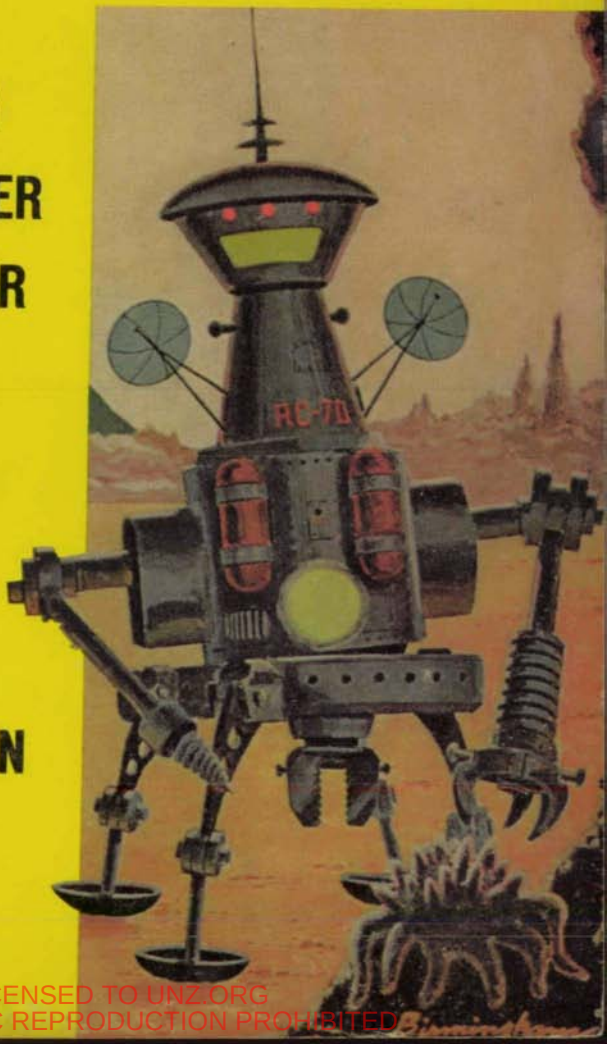
GREAT SCIENCE FICTION

No. 7 50¢

BRIAN W. ALDISS
ERTRAM CHANDLER
OHN CHRISTOPHER
J. G. BALLARD
POUL ANDERSON
MILTON LESSER
HAROLD CALVIN
ORDON R. DICKSON



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

AMAZING IS NOW LARGER THAN EVER WITH AN ADDITIONAL 32 PAGES PER ISSUE! MORE PAGES—MORE STORIES

Subscribe now and read top science-fiction stories by such great names as: ISAAC ASIMOV, RAY BRADBURY, JOHN WYNDHAM, FRITZ LEIBER, ROBERT F. YOUNG, POUL ANDERSON, KEITH LAUMER, EDMOND HAMILTON, etc.

First In Science Fiction ● Since 1926

Amazing stories

Only $2.50 for one year (6 issues)
EXTRA BONUS! Did you miss any of these great stories. FREE if you subscribe now. (One for every 1 year sub.)

266 SUNJAMMER by Arthur C. Clarke
1265 ON THE SAND PLANET by Cordwainer Smith
1065 CHRYSALIS by Ray Bradbury
865 TIME BOMB by Keith Laumer
763 REDEMPTION by Robert F. Young
365 GREENSLAVES by Frank Herbert
264 BRIDGE TO AZRAEL by John Brunner
265 FAR REACH TO CYGNUS by Fritz Leiber
564 BOILING POINT by Lester del Rey
764 PLACEMENT TEST by Keith Laumer
465 THE SHORES OF INFINITY by Edmond Hamilton
165 BLUE BOY by Jack Sharkey

CLIP AND MAIL THIS MONEY-SAVING COUPON TODAY.

Enter my subscription for the **New Giant** 162 page AMAZING STORIES (Extra 32 pages)
6 Issues only $2.50 ..... 12 Issues only $4.50 .....

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip Code** _____

Send the following free Issues ..... [List by number]
(Add 50¢ per year additional postage for Canada and Pan American countries; add $1 per year extra for all other foreign orders.)

Mail to: Amazing/ Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION

BRIAN W. ALDISS	4	HEN'S EYES
POUL ANDERSON	24	THIRD STAGE
A. BERTRAM CHANDLER	43	THE KEY
GORDON R. DICKSON	71	IT HARDLY SEEMS FAIR
JOHN CHRISTOPHER	83	WINTER BOY, SUMMER GIR
J. G. BALLARD	95	THE INSANE ONE
MILTON LESSER	106	DIVVY UP
HAROLD CALVIN	118	WHAT NEED OF MAN?

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, is published quarterly by Ultimate Publishing Co., Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364 at 50¢ a copy. Subscription rates: One year (4 issues) U.S. and possessions: $1.65; Canada and Pan American Union Countries: $2.00; all other countries: $2.50. Copyright 1967 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Copyrighted 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Co. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Illustrated by FINLAY

Inspector Thameson, well-known man-about-Mercury, comes up against one of the oddest cases of his career, with clues strewn from Hong Kong to the gravitic plexuses—the Case of the . . .

HEN'S EYES

By BRIAN W. ALDISS

MR. NORMAN FILLBROOK rubbed the end of his nose between thumb and index finger. The organ thus manipulated, having responded joyously to years of such treatment, was beautifully pliable, beautifully bulbous. Mr. Fillbrook drew pleasure from rubbing his nose; his only pleasure at present.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His new superior in the Colonial Office (Mercury), Secretary Heathercote Thatch, was demonstrating his affinities with new brooms and, in the process of sweeping clean, had raised a cloud of dust about Mr. Fillbrook's head that floated ominously there as if concealing from mortal view a damoclean sword of proven downward tendencies.

"I have been here in this establishment three weeks tomorrow, Mr. Fillbrook, is that not so?" Mr. Thatch said, looking monstrous and mottled from behind the barricades of his mustache.

"If you say so, sir."

"Damn it, it's a fact whether I say so or not. You and I are going to have a clash of wills, Mr. Fillbrook, if we are not careful."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"So am I. I'm a forgiving man, Mr. Fillbrook, but this office has been grossly mismanaged. I'm not a man to let the sun go down on my wrath—"

"Here on Mercury it can't, sir."

"Silence!—but I'm growing tired of deliberate obscurantism. Three weeks less a day I've been here and you have not put me in the picture yet."

"Oh, sir . . ." began Mr. Fillbrook, a dreadful unease filling him. For Mr. Thatch had picked up an earthgram from his desk and was scrutinizing it with a glance sufficiently blazing to illuminate half the twilight zone. "Oh, sir, I've been trying to break you in gradually. . . . The department has become so large with all these immigrants from Earth and Venus. . . . Is there something . . ."

He halted in dread. Mr. Thatch was waving the earthgram before him with the wounded dignity of a man trying to smother a fire with his best waistcoat.

"There *is* something, Fillbrook, yes. There is, to be precise, this earthgram. It comes, to amplify, from the Celestial Chuckle Ophthalmic Studios in Hong Kong, Earth. It deals, to specify, with the occular powers of one Hengist Mankiloe."

FILLBROOK gave what is termed 'a visible start'; its visibility was so great that Mr. Thatch momentarily wondered if his Chief Assistant had not contracted the Greater Mercurian Nerverot. Thus deflected from his purpose, he asked in a calmer voice, "Do I detect irom that monstrous twitch that the name Celestial Chuckle has registered in your memory?"

Reaching blindly for the reassurance of his nose, Fillbrook said, "No, sir, Mr. Thatch, it was not that. It was just—the mention of Hengist Mankiloe's name."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And what importance may his ocular abilities hold for you, pray?"

"Mankiloe himself is in our Top Secret classification."

"He is? Then I should have heard about him on the first day I arrived, not the twenty-first!"

"The twentieth, sir."

"The twentieth then, you fool! Fetch me Mankiloe's dossier at once."

"We don't have it at the moment. Inspector Thameson of Security has it."

Mr. Thatch's mustache bristled until he bore more than a passing resemblance to a bull peering over a thorn hedge.

"So? Letting a Top Secret dossier go out of this office, eh, Fillbrook? Men have done ten years in the curry mines for less."

"I got the Inspector's signature, sir," Fillbrook said, trying to take cover behind his nose.

"And I'll have his blood!"

"If you please, Mr. Thatch, Mankiloe is rather a special case. This communication about his eyes—

"What have his eyes to do with it, man?"

"The gravitic plexuses—I mean plexi. No, I think plexuses is correct. That's what they're to do with."

As he floundered, on the other side of the desk the record for the Reddest Faced Man on Mercury was broken by Mr. Thatch with several blood vessels in hand.

"Optics! Plexi—I mean plexuses! Fillbrook, what do you think you're standing there saying? Are you pulling the wool over my eyes? What's this all about?"

Desperately, waving his hands with the vigor of a Lars Porsena doing his stuff on that bridge where even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to register approval, Fillbrook cried, "It's the paintings, Mr. Thatch, the paintings, you know. Of course I wouldn't dream of wooling—of pulling your wool, but this Mankiloe business is a very strange affair, very strange indeed. If I didn't tell you about it before, it was only because I thought you might laugh at me."

Drawing himself up until he was practically levitating, Mr. Thatch took firm control of himself and said in an icy voice, "Have no fear of that; it is highly unlikely you will ever occasion me any merriment, Mr. Fillbrook. But I must point out that your elucidations are merely dragging us further into the mud. Pull yourself together and tell me—*what* paintings are you referring to?"

"Why, the ones Inspector Thameson is holding."

"Inspector Thameson again? What's the man doing, running a secondhand shop?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not to my knowledge, sir—"

A BELL pinged, interrupting them with its delicate chime as successfully as one mosquito can spoil a summer night's amour in a garden. Grunting, Thatch lumbered over to the communicator to see what it offered. He punched it and it put out its tongue of paper. Reading it with a brow of thunder and more than a hint of forked lightening, he passed it over to Fillbrook.

It came from one of the biggest stores in Wyndham, the domed city on Mercury in which the Colonial Office was established. It stated that two hundred and thirty yards of coarse second grade calico had been purchased some ten days before with a check drawn on a British bank. The check had proved unnegotiable; it was signed Hengist Mankiloe.

In an inspired attempt to avoid his superior's eyes, Fillbrook read the message through thirty-two times. So opaque a silence fell during this marathon performance, that when he did finally look up it was with the faint hope of finding that Mr. Thatch had tiptoed out of the room and—for preference—tiptoed all the way back to Earth.

Alas, Mr. Thatch had no intention of performing any such feat. He appeared, in fact, to be trying to qualify once more for the final round of the Most Crimson Man in the Universe championship. When he spoke, it was as if the massive slab of Old Red Sandstone which he so much resembled had given voice.

"The plot appears to thicken, Mr. Fillbrook."

"We have everything in hand, sir, Inspector Thameson and I. This communication was not entirely unexpected."

"Mr. Fillbrook. Optics, plexi, paintings, dud checks, yards of drapery, a man called Mankiloe . . . forgive me if I trespass on your treasured privacy, but WHAT THE DEVIL IS THIS ALL ABOUT?"

"O dear, not so loud, sir—the secretaries will hear you! It—It's the RODS, sir, the Researches into Other Dimensions. These things all tie up . . . there's a perfectly logical explanation."

Secretary Thatch struggled for supremacy with a frog in his throat. Finally he said, "There's been gross mismanagement in this department, Fillbrook. Your explanation must be not only perfect, not only logical—it must be forthcoming at once. I want no more dimensions than there is legislation to cover."

"Then I think, sir, you ought to invite Inspector Thameson across. You might find Inspector Thameson's explanation more acceptable than mine."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thatch looked Fillbrook over from head to foot in grave irony, his eyebrows twitching up and down like two squirrels playing tag round an oak bole.

"It could hardly be less acceptable," he said, adding in a voice fresh off a Plutonian glacier, "Ring for Thameson immediately. I'll speak to him."

INSPECTOR Manson Thameson was an old Mercury hand. He had known Wyndham when it was a couple of air-inflated igloos. He was a small stout man with a bad complexion and ginger hair; but being a redhead with blackheads in no way spoilt his megalomaniac vision of Mercury as a fair planet and himself as its chief Sir Galahad.

Accordingly, he became piqued as the voice of the new Colonial Office Secretary barked in his ear when he lifted his receiver. Holding the instrument at arm's length hardly remedied matters; Thameson's arms were incredibly short.

"I can't come," he said conversationally when there was a break in transmission. "I'm busy. You come over here. I know you Colonial wallahs have nothing to do but sit on your reports all day."

The sounds of a mature adult Thatch erupting were faithfully transmitted to him.

"Please yourself, of course," Thameson said, and put the receiver down gently. "We've other things to attend to."

"Mmm of course we have, dawling," said Diana Cashfare, adjusting herself more securely on her boss's knee. "Who was it?"

Thameson ran his hand so amorously through her hair that she nearly screamed.

"Dawling, you've been getting so wonderfully blonde lately. . . . What's that? Oh, some fellow from the Colonial Office. The new man, old Fillbrook's boss, Heathercote Thatch, you know. He won't bother us."

Some few hundred milliseconds later, the door opened. Thatch entered.

The Matterhorn could not have put in an appearance with more dignity; nor would the Matterhorn have had the advantage of being attended by an obsequious Mr. Fillbrook. Unfortunately the awe-inspiring effect of this visitation seemed lost on Inspector Thameson, who said, with only a cursory glance round, "Stand back from this unfortunate woman. She is radioactive. I am searching her for Strontium 90 particles."

Reluctantly concluding his topographical survey for the time, Thameson bustled the girl off-stage, and turned to put Secretary Thatch in his place.

This proved less easily done

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than said, and perhaps better left unsaid. At the end of quarter of an hour the two men were forced to acknowledge inwardly that if Thatch was an irresistible force personified then Thameson was an immovable object in human form. From then on they treated each other with the respect that grows between irreconcilables.

SO you've come to seek a little enlightenment on the Mankiloe affair," Thameson said, when it was obvious they had sparred to a standstill.

"A little *explanation* . . ." Thatch emended impatiently.

"Quite so, quite so, always glad to help a newcomer, Mr. Thatch. It must be terrible to feel like a fish out of water. Well, first we'll go next door to the old police station."

"Is that necessary?"

"Oh, it is necessary, sir," Mr. Fillbrook said, glad to be able to prove his existence verbally. "You see the Inspector keeps his paintings in there."

"So, you are an artist, Inspector?" Thatch said, surveying his opponent's carrotty skull as if comprehending its significance for the first time.

"Fillbrook meant Mankiloe's paintings. You've heard of Mankiloe, I suppose?"

"He paints." It was Thatch's bid at a punchy answer.

Shaking his head as if he had freshly taken on a wager to get one of his ears loose by Christmas, Thameson gathered up a bunch of keys and led the way outside.

Evidently hoping to remedy the ignorance of the air before him, he said, "Hengist Mankiloe is a great painter. It may be that he is the greatest painter alive today. That hardly matters. What matters is that he still paints old-fashioned traditional style, with brush and canvas and pigment. His pictures fetch money—one of them would cover a colonial officer's salary for the thick end of three mercurian years.

"Mankiloe is known throughout the system—by anyone with any cultural pretensions. But how many people have any cultural pretensions these days? Not people like Mr. Thatch and Mr. Fillbrook."

"Nonsense, Inspector, I know what I like and what I don't as well as the next man."

"Well, that's true humility for you, when you consider the next man," admitted Thameson, glancing at Fillbrook. "But all I was saying is that Mankiloe, who is a complete crook in just about every other way, has integrity when it comes to art. He won't compromise. He has remained his own man. That's why few people care for his work; it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clashes with their piddling milk-fed vision of the world."

"He sounds a detestable man."

"It's possible to detest the man and admire the artist. Anyhow, it was because so many people on Earth found him detestable—or rather because he found so many of them destestable, that he came to Mercury. Since when he has been a thorn in my ample side. But it may be that he has also discovered another dimension; I for one would be delighted if it was an artist rather than one of these god-damned toffee-nosed scientists who did it."

The signs that Thatch was winding himself up for a burst of controversy were three: a pavement-pulverizing emphasis in his tread, a tendency to smoulder about the neckline, and an increased air-intake with high decibel yield. He was about to burst into argument if not flame when they reached the ancient shack which had housed all the Wyndham police in the dear dead days when Thameson was all the Wyndham police.

Unlocking the door, the Inspector led the way in.

THE room was large and bare, with a great desk that resembled a medieval stocks in one corner, a clock whose hands—not of the best plastic—had curled into a derisory gesture, and various notices and rude epithets on the walls. Some of the latter, most of them questioning the legitimacy of the Wyndam police, were obscured by a row of canvases turned outwards along one wall so defiantly that Thatch shied towards them like a Turkish charger confronting the giaur.

Mankiloe's paintings were seven in number. Three were large, three or four feet wide by seven high; one was about four feet square; the others were smaller, going down to a rectangle nine inches wide by some twenty inches high.

"They're mere daubs!" Thatch exclaimed at once.

"Don't show your ignorance, man. Take a minute to look at them—they took days to paint."

The canvases were recognizably on the same theme. The subjects they represented were a disquieting blend of abstract and surrealist, difficult to describe. In one, a recognizable stretch of mercurian silicate desert merged into a curious distortion of towers where objects like plumes floated or lay. In another, things remotely like tractors, had tractors ever been built of woolly balls, distended themselves into a tranced brown twilight. In the third, the brown twilight was predominant; fluttering objects like falling books could be seen. In the fourth, behind a recog-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nizable boulder, something like an attenuated bus swathed in grey bunting was surrounded by wavering figures. In the fifth, the brown twilight was back, but punctuated by a curious object resembling the hull of a ship; but distortion and compression rendered its true shape unguessable.

The last two paintings bore an obvious relationship to each other. The smallest, the narrow rectangle, was of an inhuman figure; the other was, or appeared to be, a facial portrait of the figure.

It was difficult to be more explicit than that. The figure was golden, a hard unearthly gold, with three stilt-like legs and a polyhedric head. Either it was swathed in strips of cloth and armless, or it was naked and had several 'arms'. The distortion, fore-shortening, and blurring effects evident in the other pictures were equally obtrusive here; they seemed to be less a freak technique than the artist's deliberate attempt to capture something uncapturable. In the painting of the head, blurring was again present. The polyhedric shape was clear enough; several planes rose into nodes which might have been taken for features.

The execution of all seven canvasses was forceful. Here and there the paint protruded almost an inch from the rest, as if the artist had been forced to try to overcome the limitations of his medium.

"Extraordinary!" said Thatch.

Fillbrook turned to gaze in astonishment at his superior. In three weeks less a day this solitary breathed word was the only intimation he had had that Thatch could be impressed by the work of his fellow men. Like one quickly slipping a medical boot over an Achilles heel, Thatch added, "Extraordinary rubbish, I should say. Now perhaps you'll tell me what all this has to do with an optician in Hong Kong and the fourth dimension."

TEARING his gaze from the paintings and facing Thatch with the visible effort of a butler disentangling two flypapers, Inspector Thameson shook his body into a somewhat more spherical shape and said, "No time for that. I'm just off to arrest a man."

"Inspector, I came to see you expressly for the purpose of eliciting from you an explanation—"

"You may have heard of the man. His name is Hengist Mankiloe. Profession, artist. Whereabouts, out towards Brittling's Gap on the edge of the West Salt Desert not a hundred miles from here. Want to come along, boys?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As he spoke, Thameson had begun towards the door like a one-man stampede, leaving his companions little chance to argue.

"We've no reason to go," Fillbrook said feebly. He personally knew of explorers who after returning from the West Salt Desert had spent the rest of their days in a refrigerated asylum clinging to the conviction that they were Tournedos steaks *bien cuit*.

"We've every reason," said Thatch, flinging his legs into gear. Even the Salt Deserts were preferable to self-accusations that he was pampering underlings. Puffing after the nearest upholder of the law, he asked, "What made you decide so suddenly to arrest this man, Inspector?"

"I caught sight of that communication about the bouncing check Mankiloe tried to pass for the calico. It was stuck in your fist while you stood gawking at his paintings. It gives me the pretext I need for entering his caravan."

"Caravan?"

"Don't ask so many questions. Fillbrook, tell your new boss about how there's no air on Mercury outside these domes, so that itinerants have to live in caravans."

He bounded along under the polarized dome, a round determined man with a long indeterminate shadow. Behind him two stalwarts of empire strove to keep up and their dignity at the same time. They crossed Sun Avenue at a controlled canter and burst into the vehicle yard of the new Police HQ with some breath still in hand.

A sergeant came forward, listened to Thameson's instructions, and led him over to a waiting bubbletrack.

"Excellent," Thameson said. "Keep a watch for my automatic signal over UVHF, sergeant, but send a search party out for us if we are not back in this yard in twenty-four hours."

"Very good, sir."

At this exchange, both Fillbrook and Thatch quailed. Their eyes met, as far as that was possible across the natural hazard of Thatch's mustache. Something akin to mutual sympathy flickered there, like a shy fish in a large cold pond.

"Do you really think we ought to go, sir?" Fillbrook bleated.

The fish nose-dived into the murky depths.

"Duty, Fillbrook. I mean to get to the bottom of this," snapped Thatch.

"Then get to the top of this," urged Thameson, indicating the rung ladder up the side of the bubbletrack. The three men climbed up and into the vehicle. Last in, Thameson lowered the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bubble over them and clamped it down. Settling himself in the high driver's seat, he gave a chummy wave to the sergeant and let her roll.

They headed down Sun Avenue and out through the West lock.

"It's enough to melt the ball-bearings off a brass monkey out here," Thameson said cheerfully, and that the refrigerated air-conditioning was not proof against self-suggestion was shown by the beads of sweat which immediately blossomed forth on Fillbrook's forehead.

All around them stretched the landscape referred to not inappositely by a leading politician as 'the backside of the universe'. Even under a sun more glorious and unkept than Thameson's hair, the land was a sterile grey, beautified only by natural slag-hills, an occasional gay bank of ash, or the alluring black of a sluggish lead stream.

"Now, with a bit of natural scenery about us, we can relax," said Thameson, "and I'll fill you in on the background to the Mankiloe case . . ."

IF YOU ARE standing on your head again, Joe," Hengist Mankiloe said in measured tones, "I'll flay you alive and use your skin for my next canvas."

He spoke without looking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

round or ceasing to slash a mixture of burnt umber and sienna into one tortured corner of a canvas.

Behind him, Joe came abruptly down, his feet sweeping through a parabola culminating in a loud crash on the floor that rocked the caravan. He dived for shelter as a palette knife skimmed above his head.

Mankiloe sighed. His aim was off when his spectacles were. He turned back to the painting and the view through the visionport, where a thing like a distorted skyscraper lumbered about the middle distance. All this post-lunch shift he had worked at fever-pitch . . . which reminded him . . .

"Acne, old girl," he said conversationally, although nobody was present in the compartment, "I suppose you don't happen to be intending to roast us, do you? Do you mind telling me what the temperature is in here?"

"At twelve noon the longitude on the meridian approaches twelve point four two litres of prussic acid."

Wrenching himself away from his easel, Mankiloe turned and kicked at a panel of Acne, the Automated Captain and Nurse (Electronic) which coped, or was supposed to cope, with the many problems of caravan life on the equivalent of a vacuum-packed furnace floor.

"What's the matter with you, girl? Can't get any sense out of you these days."

"It's the cafard," Acne explained. "You bought this pile of junk sixth hand, I myself was third hand, you've never bothered to maintenance me, and now at last the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the square root of one is minus one."

"Okay, Acne, forget it, but let's have the place ten degrees cooler, if you can manage it."

"A drop in temperature precedes the precipitation of snow on the southern slopes of Aspasia was Pericles' mistress. Alexander was the horse of Bucephelus the Grat who—"

"ALL RIGHT, forget it! Babs!"

Babs appeared, lightly clad in a few beads and a suspicion of chiffon. This was her first trip and Mankiloe was going to make sure it was her last. She was a success in some vital respects, but her long sessions watching the Wyndham CV interfered with Mankiloe's work.

"What's the matter, Hen? Want some more beer?" she asked, with a smile that by exhibiting her teeth left nothing else to be exhibited.

Mankiloe waited patiently until her chiffon settled before replying. This body certainly knew how to dress for a warm climate.

"Yes please, love. And see that Joe's okay. Maybe he wants to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

go out. He has got the fidgets."

"So have I, come to that."

He patted her behind absent-mindedly.

"You're lovely, Babs."

"So are you, Hen."

"Get that beer, love, eh?"

"Okay."

She disappeared into the other compartment where they cooked, ate and slept. Dimly he heard her chatter to Joe. Sharply he heard her squeal in surprise. She came running back into the studio without the beer.

HEN, Hen, there's something coming—a vehicle!"

"Head'n' this way, huh?" asked Hen, hamming it up with a mid-West accent. "Kinda reckon it must be them pesky Injuns agin." He put on his spectacles to look at her. "You forgot the beer, Babs."

"But they're nearly here, Hen. Who can it be?"

The lock bell rang.

"The sound of the doorbell ringing is equal to volume times mass of the gas," Acne announced.

"Shut your great automated trap," said Hen.

"It's not really her fault," Babs said in a parenthesis. "Joe will post his crusts into her."

As Mankiloe moved over to the door, Joe skidded forward and got there first. "I'll go, I'll go," he cried.

They opened up. Three men, one nose, one Great Barrier Reef mustache, and one head of hair stood without, smouldering in the tinny confines of the caravan lock.

"You're trespassing on private property," said Mankiloe mildly. "Get out."

"I know my Mercurian law as well as you do, Mankiloe," Thameson replied, rolling forward as if he had been specially constructed to test the maximum load of caravan floors. "We're police, and I have here a warrant for your arrest on which the ink is hardly dry. Anything you say may be taken either up or down in evidence."

"That's a different kettle of fish; why didn't you say that in the first place?" Mankiloe asked defensively as he removed the paint brush from his mouth.

"He did," said Thatch.

"I'll handle this," said Thameson.

"Thank goodness," said Fillbrook.

Thameson patted Joe's head.

"A nice kid you have here. Yours, Mankiloe?"

"Hell, does he look like mine?"

A friendly atmosphere having thus been established, they settled down to business. Babs appeared after a brief interval clad in something less revealing, chiefly because she had nothing *more* revealing, and served beer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"First time I've ever sampled beer at boiling point," said Thatch, mainly to keep his end up and his stomach down, for the bumpy ride over the desert had shaken his equilibrium.

"The sale of beer has been the subject of license ever since 1869, when brewers paid tax on every hundred barrels of Beerbohm, an essayist and stylist who rose to fame in the 1890's . . ." said Acne.

"Pay no attention to her," Mankiloe told his guests. "Her beer-Beerbohm circuits appear to be shorting; they're probably adjacent. As for the temperature of the beer, I apologize. Our fridge and oven are also adjacent and there too Acne seems to be in some confusion. What can I do for you gentlemen?"

That Inspector Thameson was pulling himself together was externally evidenced only from a series of undulations of his sacrocostal area, as if in the battle to adjust himself, his ilium had become a second Ilium. The truth was, his preconceptions about artists were strong; he had expected a rebel painter like Mankiloe, this little wisp of a stoat of a man before him, to look slightly more capable of waving a banner at a barricade. However, since he was not one to take refuge in confused silence, he burst into confused speech.

"I have reason to suppose you have in your possession, Hengist Mankiloe, two hundred and thirty yards of fabric; to specify, coarse second grade calico."

"Golly, did the check bounce?" groaned Mankiloe. He caught a wolf-like grin of satisfaction on Thatch's face and added, "You can have it back intact if you like. This trip I decided to paint on hardboard instead."

"That's right," Babs said. "He's pulled out all the panelling in the kitchen to paint on. That's how Joe is able to stuff crusts into Acne."

JOE stood on his head in confirmation, Fillbrook stared at Babs in envy.

"If we can return the goods intact," Thameson said, "no doubt we can get this matter straightened out. I'll hold that rap over your head, Mankiloe, to insure I get satisfactory answers to my main line of questions."

"Ah ha, I didn't think you came all this way just for a few yards of canvas. Well?"

Scowling as when a kraken awakes with a hangover, Thatch said, "We want to know what your paintings really represent."

Thameson waved him into silence with his beer mug and assumed a judicial air.

"Supposing we lay a hypothesis before you, Mankiloe?"

"As you please."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right. Supposing we—you and me and these gentlemen and even that half-clad young lady there—were standing all unknowing on the brink of a revolutionary discovery. Supposing you could be the instrument of that discovery. Supposing you knew you could, but because you were a bit antisocial you were holding out on the world and impeding progress."

"Supposing your views and mine of what is progress did not coincide," said Mankiloe sharply.

"Joe, you go and play in the other room before there's an argument," Babs urged softly. She knew that progress and Mankiloe were as antithetical as prose style and communist manifestoes.

Inspector Thameson slapped his legs and took a new tack.

"Let me put a story to you, Mankiloe. Suppose we have a young artist. He's pretty good, becomes known to connoisseurs, but critics agree his subjects are pretty plebian.

"Suppose this young artist, after a few chastening rubs with authority, decided Earth is overcivilized and heads out for a back-water like Mercury. Let's go on to suppose he buys an old space-sealed caravan sixth-hand, and in it makes various forays into the Twilight Zone of Mercury. And there he does a lot of paintings."

They were all listening carefully. Even Fillbrook switched his gaze from Babs to Thameson with the sound of a rubber suction pad tearing off a steel wall.

Becoming somewhat histrionic under such rapt attention, Thameson rose and flung out a hand towards the nearest port.

"Look at that landscape simmering out there, gentlemen. That was what our hypothetical young artist had to paint. Dust, rock, debris. Fields of lava, no fields of grass. No trees—mountains of ash, but never a mountain ash. Blinding brightness, dense shadow, and a featureless plain that is plainly featureless.

"And yet—and yet, gentlemen—"

"Cut out the rhetoric, Thameson," Thatch interposed testily.

"And yet, gentlemen and Mr. Thatch, those are not the objects that our imaginary artist paints. Until now, he is an artist who has always depicted what he sees. He is not a surrealist; he is neither the exploiter nor the victim of his subconscious. He *paints what he sees.* And what does he see? Ha! Indescribable things, weird things—things you might say that could only belong to another dimension!"

HE lowered his voice into a whisper and his bulk into a chair, pointed a finger at Mankiloe and proceeded.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now then. Some of these revolutionary paintings sell in London, where they come under the scrutiny of certain gentlemen of the Royal Society. These certain gentlemen, as it happens, are doing research into the findings of the First and Second Mercurian Geogravitic Expeditions which took place recently.

"The curious thing is that these paintings seem to link up in an odd way with the expeditions' findings, which were otherwise inexplicable. For one thing, the findings showed several considerable perturbations in magnetic and gravitic flow on the surface of Mercury; these perturbations were not static, but moved apparently at random over the Twilight Zone, just as our imaginary artist friend did.

"What was more, after careful inquiry the Royal Society gentlemen found that the movements of the major perturbation and our minor artist coincided."

With a nervous gesture, Mankiloe pulled off his spectacles, mopping first them and then his countenance. Thameson noted the gesture and moved in his seat with such ponderous dignity that Acne was inspired to announce: "Earth's greatest mountain range is the subterranean Mid-Atlantic range, which is over 7,000 miles long."

"Silence! Proceed, Inspector Thameson," ordered Thatch.

"I was about to. The next step in the inquiry was to place the whole matter into the capable conscientious—never mind inspired—hands of a man actually on the spot, a highly talented individual we will call Inspector X.

"Now the Royal Society was fortunate in its man. Inspector X had not only a wide knowledge of matters scientific at his fingers; he also had a unique appreciation of things artistic. And he had imagination. With the comparative nearness of the sun, unusual stresses are formed on Mercury's surface that may form lesions in the fabric of space. It did not take the Inspector long to grasp that these gravitic plexuses, as the perturbations are called, might well be the gateways to other dimensions and other worlds.

"He got in touch with the RODS operative—Research Into Other Dimensions—and that gentleman confirmed the likelihood of the Inspector's supposition about the gateways.

"Obviously this artist fellow could see through these gateways. The question the wily Inspector next asked himself was —why should he alone be able to see through them? And the answer would seem to lie in the peculiar construction of the artist's eye.

"The artist, who was a little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fellow like you, Mankiloe, wore specs just like you. So our Inspector cabled off to Earth to make a few inquiries. Eventually he got a highly satisfactory answer.

"It appears our artist had bummed around a bit before leaving Earth. He lit out for Mercury from the space port in Hong Kong, but before leaving there he had had a new pair of spectacles made in the Celestial Chuckle Ophthalmic Studios. These studios in due course forwarded details, forwarded exact details of a rare type of astigmatism from which the artist suffered, and which his spectacles were designed to alleviate."

WITH a well-timed gesture the Inspector leapt forward and twitched the spectacles from Hengist Mankiloe's nose.

"And, gentlemen, here by more than coincidence is the very pair of glasses to which I refer."

He waved them aloft.

"Notice that on the nose-piece or bridge is stamped the word 'Ha-ha', the trade mark of the Hong Kong optician in question. So let us descend from fantasy to fact. *I*, gentlemen, am Inspector X. Hengist Mankiloe, you are the painter!"

Calmly, Mankiloe retrieved his spectacles and wedged them back into place.

"You have been ingenious, Inspector, you have been thorough, whereas I on the other hand am going to have another beer. But where does all this airy-fairy nonsense get you? Where does it get me?"

"It's going to get you into trouble if you don't watch your step," Fillbrook said.

"Quiet, Fillbrook," Thatch ordered. "This needs handling with tact. *I'll* speak to him."

He squared his shoulders and advanced on the painter.

"Listen, Mankiloe, we're going to let the Army Technical Wing have these astigmatism specifications. They're going to build big lenses with the same properties as your eyes. Obviously it just happens that your retina defects coincide with the degree of stress in the major gravitic plexus. But once we are equipped with these lenses, we'll be able to see what you see. How do you like that?"

"I dislike it intensely," Mankiloe said. "Just as I dislike you intensely." He turned to the Inspector.

"Mind you, I'm admitting nothing, but suppose this were all true. Suppose these Army lenses were made and you people discovered this new dimension. Then what would you do?"

"Well, er . . . the question of colonization would naturally arise . . ." The Inspector seemed ill at ease.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Of course it would, and that would be my province," Thatch said, coming to the fore again with the verve of a heavyweight back off diet on to red meat again. "We'd go in with guns, prepared to meet any trouble the natives felt inclined to offer us."

"The Strychnos Nux-Vomica is an Indian tree of the family Loganiacae. It contains strychnine, the formula for which is $C_{21}H_{22}O_2N_2$. Strymon, Struma Strutt, Struve, Strumica in Macdeonia . . . " interposed Acne, pursuing her own line of reasoning.

"Shuddup!" said Babs, who had crept back in on the discussion carrying Joe.

A momentary silence fell in the caravan. Then Thameson thumped the half-finished painting on Mankiloe's easel.

"This weird object you're painting now, Mankiloe. Looks like a cross between a Victorian hat stand and a guillotine-maker's do-it-yourself kit. You didn't invent that. You can *see* it outside when you take your glasses off, can't you? Come clean, man!"

"Inspector, do you like my paintings?"

"Why, yes, I do. They take a bit of getting used to . . . But —well, suppose this hat-stand affair was one of their trees?"

GOOD guessing, Inspector. And suppose I told you several items you couldn't guess? Suppose I told you that once you could see into that other world you could walk into it. That it was a wonderland completely new—a dimension where nothing was the same as ours, where new standards of beauty and behavior existed, where you could ever find things beyond imagining, fresh colors, different perspectives, and even alien qualities in your own body. So that everyone, even the most plebian person, could just walk in and enjoy an overpoweringly intense aesthetic experience such as only a few rare visionaries have hitherto managed to qualify for . . ."

"What a holiday center it would make!" exclaimed Fillbrook, polishing his nose in excitement.

"Go on, Mankiloe," said Thameson tensely.

"Don't tell them any more, Hen!" Babs said.

But Mankiloe had removed his glasses and was gazing out of the window like Keats sticking his head through a magic casement and casing the joint for fairy lands forlorn.

"And supposing that enchanting place were full of enchanting creatures, beings entirely outside our limited sphere of reference. Suppose these people were curious to look on, like a cross between an insect and an involved figure in a geometry book.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Suppose they were golden, of a hard unearthly gold, and had dodecahedric heads, with only a blurred suspicion of features... And suppose these people were as innocent as children and as powerful as devils."

"Could they come and go into this world?"

"Yes, though with your everyday eyes you might not recognize them."

"All right, Mankiloe," Thatch said, in the manner of one who has endured shilly-shally long enough. "Obviously this place, this dimension is ripe for exploitation. You've admitted it exists and—"

"I've admitted nothing!" Mankiloe said. "I said 'suppose' all the time. I'm an artist; I live in a world of suppose. You've come here on a wild goose chase, the bunch of you."

"Not so fast, not so fast," Thameson said. "My friend didn't mean what he was saying about exploitation."

"Or about going in armed? Or about establishing holiday centers? Rubbish! I tell you I know nothing! I paint what I imagine. Now take this wretched calico and get out of here."

"You're lying to us, Mankiloe!"

Mankiloe laughed.

"Of course I'm not. I was kidding you along, that's all. Now I'm tired of the joke and I want to get on with my painting. There's the door. Kindly use it."

NONPLUSSED, Thatch, Thameson, and Fillbrook fell back like factory owners confronted by a stray shop steward.

"Look, Mr. Mankiloe, we have got all the facts," Fillbrook said feebly.

"A few theories and a Chinese prescription—that's all you have! Take 'em and go."

"We shall pursue this matter to the limit," Thatch threatened.

"Not in my caravan you won't. Good-bye."

Recognizing defeat, Inspector Thameson picked up the bale of calico and passed it to Fillbrook to carry.

"You know, Mankiloe," he said, pausing reluctantly by the air lock, "I'm sorry you have to be like this. One of these pictures—a small one I hold back at Wyndham—it looks almost as if it might have been a child from a strange dimension—polyhedric head, golden skin, just as you said. I thought it was a beauty. I'm sorry—well, I'm sorry it's not true."

"Good day, Inspector. No charge for the beer."

Defeated, the three men disappeared.

Mankiloe, Babs and Joe climbed into the blister to watch the bubbletrack crawl off over the desert in a cloud of dust.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Prothyle is hypothetical primitive matter from which all the chemical elements are supposed to be formed," Acne said sadly.

"It's all hypothetical," agreed Mankiloe. "What those blighters will do, I mean."

"Oh, Hen, I'm sure they won't rest with your explanation," Babs said, obviously concerned.

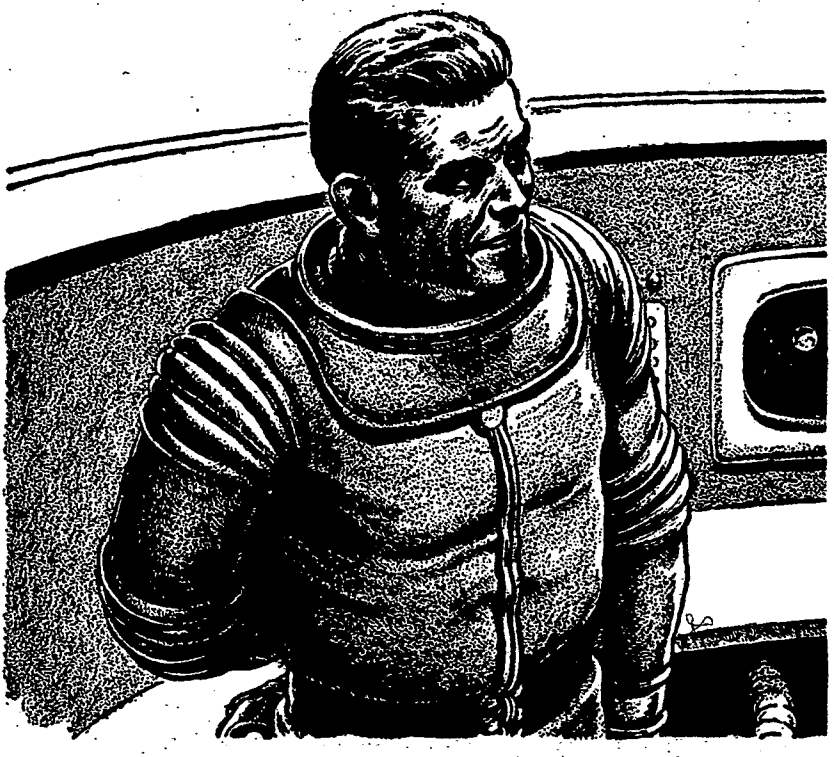
"Probably not." He removed his glasses and wiped his face wearily. Then he patted Joe's little golden dodecahedric head.

"We'd better go and tell your parents to get their solar annihilators ready," he said.

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Many years ago Frank R. Stockton wrote a famous story called "The Lady and The Tiger." With the same fiendish cleverness, Poul Anderson creates a tale that we think, sf fans will talk about and argue over for years to come—a tale of real people, of life and death, of man's inhumanity (and humanity) to man.



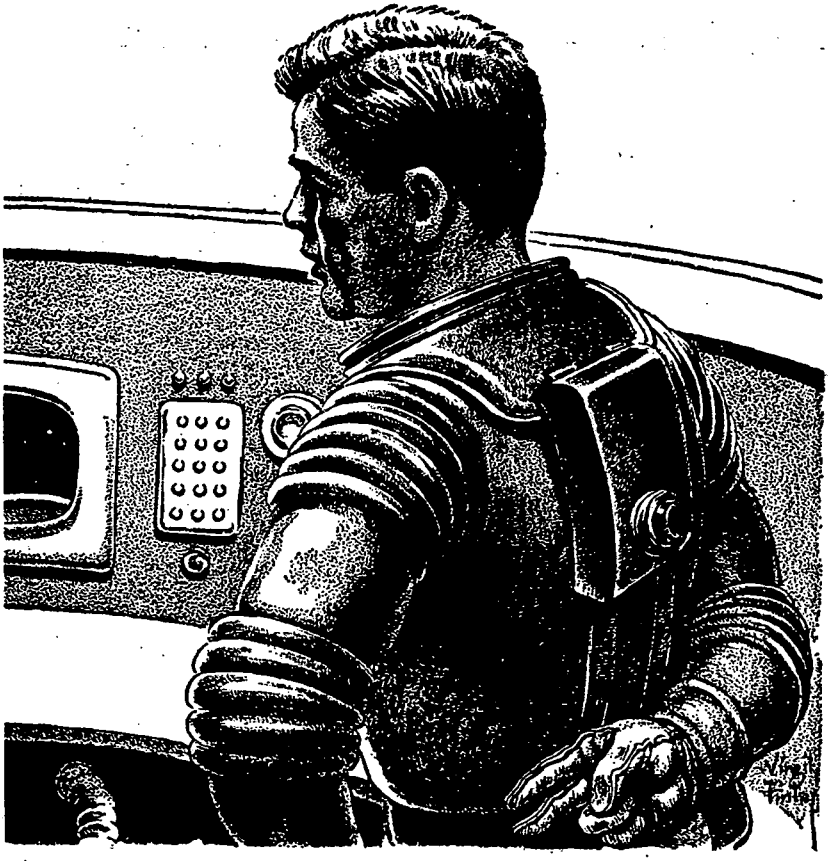
NOT long after sunset, a storm far out to sea veered in a direction the Weather Bureau computers had called improbable. By midnight there was rain over Cape Canaveral and Buckler, roused from his bed, said the shot would likely have to be post-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THIRD STAGE

By POUL ANDERSON

Illustrated by FINLAY



poned. But the rain soon slacked off and technical crews beneath the arc lights could find no harm done their bird. At dawn there was only an overcast, beneath which a muggy breeze came sighing through the gantrys and across the field. The final deci-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sion, whether to abort or go ahead, was left to the men who must actually ride the rocket. "Why on earth shouldn't we take her?" Swanberg shrugged. "Or off earth, for that matter." Holt nodded, a quick jerky movement: "Yeah, think'a fifty million women who might have to watch Enis Preston today, if we aren't on the TV."

When Swanberg noticed a passing thought, he seldom let it go in a hurry. He was a large, squinting, tow-headed man with a friendly slow voice. As they left the briefing room and started toward the rocket, he went back to Holt's remark. "Do you really think this flight is such a big production, Jim?"

"Sure." His companion made a wide gesture at buildings, machines, and bare concrete. "Didn't you know? We're clean-limbed American boys bound forth to Ride Out The Lethal Space Storms."

"But, uh, it isn't that interesting. Just a routine orbital flight. Not as if we were the first men around the moon, or even the first Americans—"

"But we are the first men of any stripe, chum, to head into the Van Allen belt and stay a while. Haven't you watched TV-*Time?* Don't you know how far the new radiation screen puts us ahead of those Russian nogoodniks?" Holt shifted his helmet to the other arm. "No, I guess you're uninformed, Bill. All you ever did was help develop the gadget. Probably spent your spare time with a book or some such anachronism. Downright subversive, I calls you."

Swanberg chuckled. He didn't like rapid-fire New York accents; the taut, status-scrabbling, publicity-wise types who infested the space project got on his nerves; but he made an exception for Holt. "Really, though," he said, "I don't get the reason for the ballyhoo. This hop is nothing but the last test of a long series. If the news services want something significant to report, why don't they do a piece on . . . oh, the ion feedback work, or—"

Holt spat. "You misunderstand, Bill. You think the news programs are to enlighten the people. Actually, they're to sell cigarets."

"Bitter today, aren't you?"

"Me? Christ, no. What have I got to be bitter about? A laugh a minute, every time I lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh the video transmission. You're the soured old gaffer, not me."

"Could be." Swanberg sighed. He made no secret of wanting to go back to Idaho, where he spent every vacation as it was, tramping the mountains and the forests. But how do you get a job re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

motely comparable—in interest and importance; to hell with pay—that far from anyplace? When he looked at the rocket where it stood waiting, tower high, iceberg massive, but with speed and grace, *upwardness*, built into every flowing line, he forgot climate and office politics and his dreary little tract house and the desperate gaiety of Laura's farewell. There was only the bird, about to fly.

HOLT, brisk even in the blue spacesuit, reached the pad first. He gave his helmet to one of the technicians, who slipped it over his head and made it fast. All the techs were enlisted men this morning, Swanberg noticed. Though civilians like Holt and himself had been infiltrating the project in ever greater numbers since the organizational shakeup of '63, the Pentagon was fighting a valiant rearguard action. At that, he'd rather have generals breathing down his neck than the reporters who'd invaded his privacy during the past few days. Swanberg was by nature an obliging soul, but after a while he began to resent being told what pose to assume on his own patio. . . . The helmet went on him too. He stared through clear polydene at a last-minute bustle which had become muffled and vague in his ears.

"How's that, sir?" asked a voice in the 'phone. "Comfortable?"

"Fine." Swanberg went almost absent-mindedly through the check routines. Not until he was rising in the cage with Holt, seeing the rocket's clifflike immensity slide past him, monster first stage, lanceolate second stage, and the capsule in the nose which would carry him around the world and through the radiation zone and back, not until then did he fully realize that the talking and planning and trying and failing and starting over again were likewise past, that today he personally was going up.

He'd done so before, of course: nowhere near as often as Holt, the test pilot; but several times, in connection with trying out some electronic development in which he had had a part. Not even a night along the upper Kootenai was as beautiful as the night above this gray heaven. He had envied the *voyageurs* who first saw the loneliness of the high West, until he became one of today's *voyageurs*—if only his journeys could be oftener! He pulled his mind back to practicalities, squeezed through the capsule airlock after Holt and strapped himself into his adjoining seat. Though the Aeolus three-stager was by now the most reliable workhorse in the whole American space program,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there would be a dull couple of hours to go through, checking and testing, before blastoff.

He threw a glance at Holt. The pilot's dark sharp features were misted. Sweat? Swanberg felt a slight shock. When he listened closely, he detected a note of shrillness in Holt's responses on the intercom. But Holt couldn't be scared; he wouldn't do this, time after time after time, if he was scared; why, merely thinking of his responsibilities, his own wife and kids, would—High-strung, that was it. Of course. Swanberg tried to relax and concentrate on his own job.

STAGE Two dropped on schedule. A-OK," said the voice from above. There was no need; telemetered instruments had registered the fact clearly enough in the control blockhouse. But Tom Zellman was glad of the words. They were a much needed dramatic touch. Blastoff had been great, as always, vapor clouds and immense boneshaking roar and sudden, accelerating climb of the giant. But since then there had been little to see down here. He had had his cameramen pan in on the faces of the ground crew—visible through a thick glass panel between their work space and the TV booth—until he felt his audience was sick of it. His roving reporters elsewhere on the base had gotten nothing interesting from the scientists. The interviews amounted to a bunch of young crewcuts and old Herr Doktors saying yes, we sent men on the final test of the radiation screen, but not to check on the screen itself; our unmanned shots gave us enough such data; only because man is the one instrument whose observations are not limited to those for which someone designed him. What kind of show was that? Especially when the Dodgers-White Sox game would soon start on another network.

Zellman signalled for the view to cut back to him. He beamed and said resonantly: "A-OK. Everything's fine up there, Laura Swanberg, Jane Holt, and all your kids. Everything's fine, Mr. and Mrs. America." He deepened his tone. "Cold thousands of miles above the green fields of their native land, two young men are entering the deadly radiation current which boils eternally around our planet. Trusting their lives to an invisible shield of pulsed magnetic energies—and to God," he remembered to add, "they are going to circle the globe for ten lonely hours. If they succeed . . . if they come home again unharmed to their loved ones . . . then the way is open for Americans to explore the Solar System, unafraid of those lethal blasts from the sun

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which—" He saw the Number Two cameraman holding his nose and barely suppressed a scowl. That smart aleck would hear from Tom Zellman after this was over. "—which have so long limited the time and places our ships could venture beyond the atmosphere." Well, maybe the corn syrup was getting too thick at that. Zellman flipped a switch and projected a still pic onto a screen for transmission.

IT WAS a cutaway view of a standard Aeolus third stage. Because a good deal of the innards had still been secret when the drawing was made, the artist had relied considerably on his imagination. Joe Blow wouldn't know the difference anyway. The capsule was shown blasting with its spin jets as well as the main rocket motor. Actually, Zellman supposed, those small swiveling nozzles were only to aim it in the right direction. The real thrust would come from the stern jet. And would hardly be used at the present time. Maybe a bit of push here and there, to get Stage Three into precisely the correct orbit. But generally speaking, Stage Two did that job. The main task of the Stage Three motor was to bring the capsule down again—to brake orbital velocity until the ship spiraled into atmosphere and its parachute could take over.

HOWEVER, the clip was a good dramatic pic. Zellman left his desk and pointed at the two human figures. "That's Jimmy Holt piloting the spaceship. The ground crew is standing alertly by, ready to take over if he needs help. A giant computer clicks madly" (or does it whirr, or flash lights, or what?) "digesting the information sent down by radio instruments. Powerful remote-control impulses are sent back, guiding, helping. But in the last analysis, the pilot controls the ship. How do you like that, Pete and Hughie? That's your dad there, riding that rocket like a cowboy rides a bronco. Next to him Billy Swanberg peers at the radiation shield meters. If the screen should fail—But no, little Julie, that isn't going to happen. Your father is going to come back to you, safe and sound—"

"Preparing to assume final orbit," said the dry voice. There went a hissing and crackling undertone of static.

"That was Jimmy Holt," explained Zellman. "Jimmy Holt, preparing for the last delicate touch of jets that will throw him into the heart of the densest Van Allen belt." He glanced at the clock. The damn capsule ought to be stabilized or whatever you called it in another few minutes. Then he could turn the program over to Harry while he got

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lunch. He'd missed breakfast and his belly was growling. Good Lord! Suppose the sound mikes picked that up?

The idea worried him so much that for a while, a whole thirty or forty seconds, the fact didn't register on him, what it meant, Holt speaking again: "The main jet doesn't respond. The goddam thing won't fire. What's gone wrong?"

THE vision scope showed Earth like a globe of itself, so enormous against blackness that Holt's eyes joined his middle ear canals in making weightlessness appear to be a meteor's fall. Any minute now, any second, they'd hit the ground and spatter. . . . He shook off the illusion. *Stop that, you schnook. You've been orbital often enough to know better. I wish to God we* were *headed down. No, we're stuck in the sky like Mohammed's coffin. Like half a dozen other dead guys in capsules that never returned, still whirling around the world. I wonder if we'll see one of 'em.*

He pulled his gaze from the scope. Bill Swanberg could sit for hours mooning over how pretty Earth was. Holt had other business on hand. He'd long ago stopped getting any kicks from the scenery. (Oh, no denying it had beauty, the vast round ball, softly blue, banded with white clouds, blazoned with green and dusky continents . . . crowned by uncountably many stars, guarded by the Horned Goddess herself . . . but the cabin here wasn't big enough to swing a kitten, it clicked and whickered, ventilators blew continuous gusts in your face, the air stank of oil and man, and you really had no time to look at anything but the meters.) He had never been glamor-struck by the spaceships anyhow. When routine psychophysical exams showed he had a natural aptitude for piloting, he'd snapped at the offer from Canaveral, because that was an even quicker route to executive rank than the engineering in which he had trained. A pilot who knew his way around people and watched his chances could step into some very fat jobs after a few years.

If he lived that long, of course.

Holt glanced at Swanberg. Unhelmeted, the electronics man's broad freckled face glittered with sweat. Little droplets broke off and floated in the air currents. But he proceeded doggedly with his instrumental checks. From time to time he told Base his results, in a perfectly cool tone. Bill was a good joe, Holt thought. The phrase struck him funny. He started to laugh, but stopped himself in time.

"That's about everything," Swanberg finished.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're getting near our horizon," said the man down at Canaveral. Static hissed and sputtered around his words. "I think we can figure out what your trouble is, though, before you're gone from line of sight."

"Hope so," Swanberg drawled. "Hate to wait out another half orbit or thereabouts, wondering whether it's gremlins or trolls." He hesitated. "Standing by, then," he said. "Over and out." He cut off the transmitter.

TRAVELING eastward at miles per second, the capsule was once again over the night side. Earth's disc had become a crescent, its darkness edged with sunlight and tinged by moonlight. Had the tracking stations in that hemisphere been prepared, continuous contact would have been maintained. But they weren't. No one had expected this to be anything but a milk run.

"How's the rad screen holding out?" Holt asked, to drown the machinery noises. His throat felt caught between cold fingers.

"Fine," Swanberg said. "Hardly an electron more is getting through than 'ud get through half an Earth atmosphere."

Suddenly his calm was intolerable. Holt pounded the control panel with his fist, softly and repeatedly. His thin body rebounded in the harness. "What's gone wrong?" he groaned. "Why won't the main jet fire?" In a rush of resentment: "Goddam Rube Goldberg monstrosity. Five million things to go haywire. Why can't they design 'em simple and right?"

"They're working on it," said Swanberg. "But a spaceship has a lot of separate functions to perform, you know. You and I are Rube Goldberg monstrosities too. It doesn't take much to make us stop functioning—one blood clot can do it."

"Yeah, yeah. I guess so." Holt tensed his tongue to spit, but recalled where he was. "So much for that God guff," he said. "I can't believe in a God who's that lousy an engineer."

"I daresay a molecule of fuel could make a similar objection as it burns," Swanberg answered. "No religion worth a hoot ever promised us happiness. We do get a fighting chance, though. Does a man really want more?"

"This one does," Holt said. "I want to get back where I belong."

"Sure," Swanberg said. "Don't misunderstand me, Jim." A grin stretched his mouth, less a smile than a baring of teeth. "I'm scared worse than you are."

"Wanna bet?"

SILENCE closed in again. Holt tried frantically to think of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something to say that wouldn't sound too stupid. Speculation on what the trouble with the rocket was . . . but that was being computed, not guessed at, down on Base, where they had not only the data Swanberg sent but information telemetered from the entire ship. . . . Continue the God argument? No, he and Bill had left their sophomore years behind them. . . . Sentimental reminiscences about wives and kids? Cannonballs! Laura and Janie—oh, Janie gal—

"Canaveral to Aeolus. Canaveral to Aeolus."

The voice was dim, wavering across the scale, nearly drowned in hoots and squeals and buzzes. So fierce was the ionic current beyond this hull that a tight, hard-driven FM beam could barely get though. But Swanberg leaped in his chair to switch on the transmitter. Holt beat him to it.

"Do you receive me, Aeolus? Cana—"

"Aeolus to Canaveral," Holt rattled through a mouth full of cotton and pepper. "We read you. What's the word?"

The voice dropped formalities. It shook. "We've identified your trouble. I'm afraid—the—Your main discharge valve is stuck. Probably a thin seal of ice, due to condensation last night when the air was so damp. A, a little water vapor in that cranny—you know?—normally the rocket exhaust would flush it out, but in this case—"

"Get to the point!" Holt screamed, for the voice was fading away every second. "What do we do?"

"Can't cut out the safety circuits and blow the valve open with a minimal jet," came the remnant of answer. "Ordinarily you could, but—" Static sheeted.

"I know that," Swanberg barked. "The rad screen's in the same hookup, to save weight. We'd fry. I helped install the blinking thing, you! What *can* we do?"

A gulp: "Someone . . . got to go out the airlock . . . crawl around behind, into the tube, bust the ice loose by hand—one of you—" Then there was only the seething.

Holt stared at a meter face for an indefinite while. Eventually he glanced at Swanberg. The big man was finishing a slide rule calculation.

"I suppose you know the magnetic deflection effect drops off on a steep inverse square curve," Swanberg said without tone. "If a guy went outside here in the middle of the Van Allen, even hugging the hull, he'd get a lethal dose in something like ten minutes. How long would he need to free the valve and get back inside?"

"Half an hour, at least," Holt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard himself answer. "It's a clumsy business, working in free space."

They fell silent again.

TOM Zellman looked straight into the pickup. As soon as the news arrived, he had ducked out to change his sports shirt—althought it was his trade mark—for a dark suit and sincere tie. Now he spoke in measured cadence.

"You have just seen an interview with General Buckler, commander of Cape Canaveral Base, the man on whose shoulders has fallen the agonizing responsibility of choosing who shall live and who shall die," he said. "General Buckler did not, of course, have time to explain the situation in detail." (General Buckler, in point of fact, had retreated so far into his military shell that getting a dozen words from him had been like milking a constipated cow. Hysterical reaction; this kind of publicity could crumple a career. But Zellman would cover for him: such IOU's were always collectible later.) "So let me try, Mr. and Mrs. America. You want to know what faces your boys out there. Savage cold, blazing heat, whizzing meteorites, weightlessness, raw vacuum . . . and now the deadly, blasting radiation of the charged particle zone in which they are trapped.

"Because one valve has stuck, the main jet on their capsule won't fire. The side jets are only for steering. Their small separate motors can't burn long enough to bring the capsule down out of orbit. It won't be hard to get that vital part unstuck. Half an hour or less, and the third stage rocket is free to come home again. But—that half hour must be spent outside the hull. The force screen that protects Billy and Jimmy from the radiation, *inside* the cabin, cannot protect the man who goes out. He will get such a searing blast through his spacesuit that no medical science can save him. In a few days he will be dead. But his comrade" (oops!) "his friend will come down to Earth unharmed." Zellman dropped into the upper bass register. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend."

THE teleboard behind the cameras had been forming words for some seconds. Zellman crooked a finger beneath his desk. A boy came running and handed him a sheet of paper. Zellman unfolded it and spent thirty seconds letting emotions play across his face. Then he lowered the paper—carefully, so the audience couldn't see it was blank—and raised the pitch and speed of his delivery.

"Flash! Three more tracking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stations have locked onto the capsule. This means that continuous two-way contact can be maintained. Billy and Jimmy can't see us, but our voices, our prayers, can come to them. By special arrangement, this network will have the honor of preparing the unofficial messages they can now receive. Do you hear me, Jimmy and Billy? You are not alone. One hundred and ninety million of your fellow Americans are with you, fighting, suffering, praying with you." The teleboard wrote STANDING BY WITH JANIE STILL CAN'T GET LAURIE. "But you don't want to hear me talk," Zellman said, venturing a gallant smile. "We have contacted Jimmy's wife, Janie Holt, and his four children, Pete, Hughie, Susie, and little Gail. The engineer is signalling me that we can go on the air, Jimmy, direct from your own home to you. Do you hear me?"

Faintly, scratchily, as if it were a midge caught somewhere inside the blackness of a telephone receiver, there came: "Holt speaking. I read you." The engineer scowled and twiddled knobs in his cage. The sound wasn't going onto the TV frequencies very well. But his assistant nodded, and a monitor unit came to life beside Zellman's desk. The visual transmission across the country would be split-screen, one side showing himself in the blockhouse TV booth on Base, the other side showing the scene in the monitor: Holt's family in their house downtown.

Jane Holt was small and dark like her husband. The plain black dress showed her figure to advantage, and the makeup man had done a good job on her and the kids. They were well posed too, the boys on either side of her chair, the girl at her knee and the baby in her arms.

"Hello, Janie," said Zellman with his Undertaker's Special smile.

"Hello . . . Tom." He wished she wouldn't speak quite so thinly.

"In a minute, Janie, we'll put you through to your Jimmy. But first, wouldn't you like to say a word to the rest of your family? Your family and his—the great, warm, wonderful family of America, hanging on the edge of their television screens, hoping, loving, and praying. Their hearts are with you at this moment. Believe me, they are; I know those wonderful people so well. Just a word, Janie?"

Whoever had set up the idiot board behind the camera in her place knew his job; her eyes seemed to look straight from the screen, into the viewer's. There hadn't been time to rehearse her, so her delivery was rather mechanical—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"—Thank you so much, each and every one of you. I, I know how much Jimmy thanks you too—"

—but on the whole, Zellman thought, she was effective. Harry had always been able to whip out a fast script with zing in it.

The teleboard said STILL CAN'T GET LAURIE STOP DOORS LOCKED AND CURTAINS DRAWN STOP DOESN'T ANSWER PHONE STOP HODGKINS AND BURR CAMPING ON HER PORCH WITH OTHER NETWORKS MEN AND REPORTERS.

"—God's will be done. But oh, we do hope Jimmy comes back safe!"

HAVING finished, Jane sat at a loss. Her kids stared woodenly into the camera, and the baby started to cry. Zellman said hastily, "Thank you, Janie. Have you been in touch with Laurie Swanberg yet? You know her well, don't you?"

"Yes. No, I mean, I haven't heard from her. I, I tried to phone . . . we ought to be together, oughtn't we? . . . but—" Jane drew a deep breath and flung out: "She's probably off by herself, with her *two* children."

"I'll switch you over to your husband now," Zellman said before a crisis was precipitated.

"Jimmybuck," Jane said like a sleepwalker.

"Hi, kid," said the voice torn by static.

"How . . . how are you?"

"Okay so far. Sweating out the Old Man's decision."

"Jimmy—come back. Tell your daddy to come back." Hughie began to blubber. "We need you so."

"Hey, wait—" Holt's response was lost in the crackling.

"Jimmybuck, I love you," Jane said. She began to cry too.

"Same here, kid. All youse kids. But—" The static chose that exact moment to let up, so the harshness came through. "This is no place to say it, huh? We'll do whatever the Old Man tells us, Bill and me. So long, darling."

"Jimmy!" she called, once and again. Only the static answered. Until Swanberg said, recognizable as himself: "I think we better cut off transmission for a while."

"Is that you, Billy?" Zellman asked.

"This is Swanberg, yes."

"Billy, we've been trying as hard as we can to get your Laurie for you, but—"

"Aeolus to Canaveral," Swanberg said. "Over and out." There was a distinct snick. The static went off the air.

That bastard!

Zellman turned to Jane in the screen. She was weeping, quite prettily. But beyond a certain point in affairs like this, you risked a public squawk. "I think we had best leave you for a while,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Janie," he said, sweet and low. "Not alone, of course. You will never be alone again; our hearts will always be with you."

She whirled on him and screamed: "I've played your game! Why not? It might get him back. And we've got four children and she only has two!"

Luckily, Zellman and the camera crews had seen that coming, and had a delay circuit to help them. None of her outburst went onto the air.

THE teleboard said BILLYS MOTHER CONTACTED IN TWIN FALLS AND CONSENTS TO INTERVIEW BUT NO SCRIPT. Zellman signalled "Stand by" and his order was phoned to Idaho. Better space the tear jerking scenes further apart. He switched to outside views of the Holt and Swanberg houses, with his own commentary. The state police were breaking up the traffic jams.

Whoa! Laurie herself came out on the porch. She swatted three reporters aside and yelled for a cop and got him to chase everybody off her grounds. There was no chance for closeups; her door slammed again before a telecamera could arrive. But even from a distance—what a scene, what a SCENE!

Of course, she wasn't doing her husband's chances any good. Buckler wasn't dumb enough to sentence the more popular man to death. . . . Trouble was, though, Swanberg was a big, good-looking, outdoors type; and not just any slob rocketeer, but a co-inventor of the rad screen. Popularity. . . .

The teleboard awoke. Zellman surged from his chair. He almost didn't find words, this was so big. He actually did forget to signal for a sheet of paper.

"Flash! Here's the word from Base headquarters. General Buckler has issued an announcement. Quote: 'Not only are Mr. Holt and Mr. Swanberg both valuable members of our project and citizens of our community, they are both civilians. As such, they lie beyond my authority to give more than normal orders, and this is not a normal situation. I have therefore sent a special request to the President that he decide which of them should perform the task in question. A reply is expected shortly.'

"Unquote. That was General Buckler's decision: to let the President of the United States choose, in the name of all America. While we wait, anxiously and prayerfully, here is a word from—"

FALLING and falling, Swanberg thought. And now the silence had began to press inward. Still he heard click, buzz, whirr, whuff; lately he had been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hearing the blup-blup of his heartbeat. (Maybe that was because it had gotten irregular, sometimes skipping so that he jerked in his harness and tried not to gasp.) Yet the silence grew.

Imagination, he understood irritably. Silence wasn't a thing, it was an absence of sound, just as the void was an absence of matter. His sensation of black nothing eating in toward the core of himself was purely subjective, based on no more than . . . . well, reality. The universe was in fact a trillion light-years of emptiness wherein a few sand grains were lost.

No, now you're thinking like Jim. Size hasn't got anything to do with importance. Vacuum and gamma radiation are real, sure. But so's the sunlight on a mountain lake, and Laura, and—He shook his weary head and turned to Holt. The pilot had tuned radio reception so far down that they could hear only a murmur; but he was alert for anything important. "What's being sent us now?" Swanberg asked.

Holt put his ear close to the receiver. "The Reverend Norbert Victor Poole, author of the best-selling book *The Strength in Confident Living*, will deliver us a message of hope shortly. And the Emperor of Abyssinia has added his official best wishes to those of other governments."

"Yeah," Swanberg mumbled.

Presently: "If they don't get off their dead ends and reach a decision soon, we'll have to toss a coin."

"Can't toss a coin in free fall, even if we had one," Holt said. "Gotta match fingers. You know, odd or even number of fingers spread at the same time. If you match me, you win, otherwise I do. Unless you'd rather it was the other way around."

Swanberg checked the odds. "Makes no difference."

"Maybe we should'a done it that way in the first place," Holt said. "Instead of asking Base for orders. But I just automatically figured—Or didn't I have the nerve? Better this way. Let an outsider give the word, backed by public opinion if not by law, and the unlucky one has got to go, period. But if we matched, and I lost . . . dunno what I'd do."

"Scared?" Swanberg asked, forcing a smile.

"Christ, yes. Worse every minute. Why don't those sods *decide?*"

"Would you like to make a choice like that . . . for somebody else?"

"I'd get it over with. I would! Judas, Bill, you aren't human, sitting there so quiet and—Why won't Laura talk to you?"

"With a planetful of morons listening in?" Swanberg snapped. "We know what we're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thinking right now, she and I. It's nobody else's business."

"Hey!" He saw Holt stiffen in the spacesuit. The pilot reached a fist toward him. "Do you mean Janie—What're you getting at? Spit it out!"

"Sorry. I'm awfully sorry," Swanberg exclaimed in dismay. "I didn't mean anything. Honest. Your arrangements are your own affair. She's got to do what she thinks is right."

HOLT unclenched his fist. The hand drifted limply between them. "I'm sorry too," he muttered. "I blew my top. She did embarrass the hell out of me." Suddenly he laughed. "What are we doing, being embarrassed? One of us is going to die in an hour or so."

"No, he'll take several days to die, on Earth," Swanberg said, stolidly, since that was his best defense against panic. "They'll send him wherever he asks." He paused. "They might even let him alone."

"Fat chance," Holt said.

Swanberg fumbled for words. "If . . . if you're the loser, Jim . . . I'll see to it that your family—"

"Oh, they'll be left well off, money-wise," Holt said. "Yours too, I suppose. Bill—"

"Yes?"

"Are you scared like I am?"

"Worse, probably."

"Thanks for saying so, anyhow. It's this sitting and waiting. I'd almost rather go out and do the job now, myself!" Holt started. "Hey, isn't that a call from Base?" He turned the receiver to full volume. The mellow baritone rolled forth:

"—Oh, my brave brothers, be happy, be confident. There is no death. God is waiting to call you home."

Swanberg reached out a long arm and switched on the transmitter. "Aeolus to Earth," he said, loud and clear. "Horse manure." He switched off again and Holt turned the receiver back down.

THE President of the United States left his desk and went to a window. Outside, the White House lawn stretched dazzling green—*What a beautiful planet we have,* he thought; *why do men go away from her to die?*—until it ended at the fence. Beyond, sidewalk and street were packed solid. The police had stopped trying to make the crowd move on. It wasn't physically possible. The latest word was that one man had had a fatal heart attack and one women of less than average stature had suffocated out there. Not that the crowd was disorderly. The President thought he had never seen one more quiet.

"Death watch," he said aloud.

"Sir?" asked his press secre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tary. They were alone together.

"Nothing. You know," said the President, "it's funny how a person keeps thinking of irrelevancies at a time like this. Anything to postpone the main issue. I keep wondering whether Buckler pulled me such a scurvy trick that I ought to have him transferred to the Aleutians . . . or did the only right and honorable thing under the circumstances."

"He could have told Holt and Swanberg to make their own decision," said the press secretary.

"No. That would have been shifting the burden onto them. And they have enough to bear." The President sighed. "There isn't any basis for decision. I've spent an hour with their dossiers. Both are fine, decent, outstanding citizens. Both have dependents who'd be cruelly hurt."

"Holt has two more kids than Swanberg does, Mr. President."

"That cuts very little ice with me. Especially remembering that Holt has no close kin alive, while Swanberg's got a mother and two sisters."

"Last time I had Tom Zellman on the phone, down at Canaveral, he said calls coming in to his station were running about five to three in favor of Holt. Of Holt getting back whole, I mean."

"No doubt," said the President dryly. "Swanberg and his wife have been less politic, shall we say. However, I feel reasonably sure that his backers tend to be more intellectual, somewhat wealthier, and with more influence per capital. Three bankers and college presidents versus five housewives and mail clerks. Beg pardon, I mean five homemakers and junior executives. What sort of odds will that amount to by the time the next election rolls around? Pretty even, I'd guess."

The secretary made no answer, but the President filled one in for him and went on:

"Bitter? Of course I am. Bitter at how this whole affair has been mishandled, and bitter, with quite a little self-pity, at becoming the goat. The one who has to say, He shall live and you must die. I never wanted to play God."

"You'll have to, Mr. President."

"Uh-huh. Right now. I've prepared two statements here, one for Holt and one for Swanberg, explaining the reasons why he should be the survivor. They are good, sound, carefully chosen and shrewdly phrased reasons, if I do say so myself."

"And—?" The secretary stepped close.

"Lend me a quarter, Bob."

Wordlessly, the coin changed hands. "Heads, Holt," the President said. "Tails, Swanberg." He tossed. The coin caught a shaft of sunlight and glittered. He didn't catch it. It went on the rug. Both men knelt to look.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Heads," said the secretary in a whisper.

The President nodded. He got slowly to his feet, like an aging man, and tore the paper with Swanberg's qualifications into shreds. The other he handed to the secretary. "Give this to the press as my considered reasons for picking Holt," he said. "Then clear my calendar. I'll call Buckler myself—I've got that much guts left—but I can't see anyone else today. Nobody."

CANAVERAL to Aeolus. Canaveral to Aeolus. Are you there? Come in, Aeolus."

Abruptly Holt knew what the mumble was—two or three syllables leaped out into his understanding—and he turned the volume high with darkness rising ragged before his eyes.

"Aeolus to Canaveral," said Swanberg across the roar in Holt's ears. "We read you. Come in, Canaveral."

How could Bill sit there like a stone toad and talk? Holt wondered for a moment if his own heart was going to explode.

"(Got them for you, sir.) Hello, Aeolus. This is General Buckler. How are you doing?"

"Okay," said Swanberg. Fighting his pulse rate down toward something reasonable, Holt saw that every trace of color had left the electronician's face. Yet he spoke with machine precision. "But we'll have to begin deceleration soon or our air supply will get dangerously low."

"That's understood, Swanberg . . . Bill . . . that is you, isn't it? Yes. We, uh, we've heard from the President. Five minutes ago".

"What?" asked Swanberg without inflection. Holt clenched his fists until the nails scored the palms.

"I'm sorry, Bill," Buckler got out.

Swanberg didn't move a muscle, but the ventilation stirred the yellow hair on his head.

"The President's message is as follows," Buckler said. " 'My decision has been impossibly difficult, for both William Swanberg and James Holt are men whose loss will be felt as grievously by their country as by their own loved ones. However, since a decision must be made, in view of the fact that he has more children and that possibly he will make less pilot error in returning the capsule to Earth if he knows he is to live, I recommend that Mr. Holt remain within the cabin. To Mr. Swanberg and his family I can only extend my deepest sympathy and my assurance that none of us will ever forget his service.' "

"Thanks," Swanberg said. "We'll get right to work."

"W-w-we're trying to contact your wife," said Buckler.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No!" Swanberg exclaimed. "Not that. Leave her alone, you hear me?" He snapped off the transmitter with such violence that he almost broke the switch.

I'm going to live, it shouted in Holt. *I'm going to live.* Then he met Swanberg's eyes.

THEY regarded each other a long time. "What can I say, Bill?" Holt managed in the end. He could barely form the words; his tongue felt like a lump of wood.

"Nothing. It's okay, Jim. No hard feelings." Swanberg was quite gray, but he extended his hand.

"Damnation, I wish—I almost wish—"

"It's okay, I tell you." Swanberg left his hand out, untaken, for Holt hadn't seen it. "The President's a good man. Wasn't easy for him either."

"N-no. I wish he'd left out that 'loved ones' cornball, though."

"Me too. Well, no sense wasting time. Shake," Swanberg reminded him.

They clasped hands. Both felt cold.

"Hello, Billy, and you too, Jimmy," roared the receiver. "This is Tom Zellman down at Base. By special arrangement, at this most solmen moment, the Boys' Choir of the New York cathedral of your church, Billy, is preparing to sing the hymns chosen by your mother in Twin Falls. We will be bringing you her own voice as soon as we can. Meanwhile, the Reverend Norbert Victor Poole —"

"Oh, no!" Holt breathed.

"Hello, Jimmy," said the rich baritone. "Yes, you, Jimmy. I am talking to you. For you have a role even more difficult than Billy. He is making the supreme sacrifice and then going to his so fully deserved eternal reward. But you must live. You must use the life your friend is giving you, confidently, inspiringly, so that the youth of America—"

Holt turned him off.

"You'll have to switch back on," Swanberg sighed. "To get return instructions. But I daresay they'll skip the organ music then." His lips tightened. "Help me on with my helmet, will you? I've got to get outside. Before Mother—Hurry up, will you?"

Holt sat very still. *I don't have to dance at their show,* he thought. *I haven't got strings tied on me. Yet.* It was as if someone else entered him.

"Wait a minute," he said, speaking fast so that he wouldn't get time to interrupt himself; for the fear was thick in his chest. "Ease off. I've got some say in this too."

"You?" Swanberg's tone hurt. Maybe he didn't mean the way he spoke, but—

"Yeah," Holt chattered. "I've

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been here with you a good many hours now, listening to 'em below passing the buck, like a mucking three-stage rocket, Buckler to the President, and meanwhile using us to sell underarm grease. Using Janie, as far as that goes. I wish she'd had Laura's backbone."

"Hell," muttered Swanberg, flushing the least bit, "that's only a matter of—uh—"

"Lemme finish, damn you! We started this nightmare, you and me, passing the buck ourselves. Now it's come back to us. Or ought to, at least. We're the third stage. What the hell am I saying? Mainly, I guess, we don't have to go along with this farce. The President knows that. Think his words over. He didn't order, he recommended. He hasn't got power to give orders. As long as this bucket is aloft, only the captain can give orders that stick, and I'm the captain."

"What are you getting at?" Swanberg's big hands reached as if to seize Holt and shake him, but withdrew again, an inch at a time. The ship mumbled, tumbling through endlessness.

"We don't have to go along with them," Holt yelled. "I've had it, I tell you. Up to here. Shut up, I'm the captain. Listen. I'm not trying to be any hero, but—I don't know. Maybe I'm afraid you'd come back every night. . . . I'll take full responsibility, when we reach Base. You don't have to fear any consequences. Buckler, the President, and now me. I'm the third stage and I've cut loose and I'm going home under my own power!"

HE recognized the hope that flickered so wildly across the other man's face, and a part of him shrieked with anger at the foolishness of the other part and none of him understood very well what this was about. But having gone this far, he couldn't retreat. And it was worth it—maybe completely worth it, maybe only almost worth it—to know, for however long he might live, that he was a free man.

"What do you mean?" Swanberg sagged in his harness.

"We're going to do this right," Holt answered. He put one hand behind his back. "Odd or even. Match me."

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE KEY

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

Many writers have tried to answer the question: What is our Galaxy? Here is an answer that will first shock you, then horrify you, then repel you—then make you think.

THERE'S a key.

Man has been hunting for it ever since Man *was* Man. That curiosity, I suppose, is a trait inherited from our simian ancestors. Had our forebears been of canine or of feline stock it is probable that we should not be spending so much of our time asking, *Why?* Dogs and cats are not of an enquiring nature, unless food is involved. Monkeys are. But if our ancestors had been dogs or cats we should not be Men, not in the true sense of the word, and our intellectual energies would be directed only towards the more efficient production of food and shelter, and it is highly probable that we should never have left the surface of our own planet.

But we *are* Men, close cousins to the monkeys, and we did leave the surface of Earth, and that is how I came to be drinking in *Susie's Bar and Grill* in Port Forlorn, on Lorn, most dismal of the Rim Worlds, that night, and that is how Halvorsen came to find me there.

I'll say this for Halvorsen; he didn't look like a monkey's cousin. He looked like a monkey. He didn't need to put his hands over his eyes or his ears or his mouth to look like one of the three wise monkeys, however. He looked like a smallish, gray ape that has lived long enough to achieve and, even, to surpass human intelligence. He was skinny, but carried a pronounced pot belly. His dark, wizened face was framed by bushy gray side whiskers, and from it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Halvorsen didn't look like a monkey's cousin—
he looked like a monkey."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stared two large, mournful, brown eyes.

I felt those eyes staring at me. I felt them for seconds before I lifted my head from my arms and looked into them, across the table with its filled-to-overflowing ashtrays, its dirty glasses, its little, stagnant pools of spilled drinks.

I was in no mood for company. That was why my friends—Second and Third Mates of the *Rimhound*, their girls and my girl—had left me. I was feeling disgusted with everything and everybody, including myself, and the more that I drank the more disgusted I was feeling.

"Go away," I said to Halvorsen. "Go away. I don't know what you're selling, but I don't want any today, thank you. Not today. Not ever."

"How do you know?" he countered.

"Because I know everything," I replied. "Liquor makes me that way. I know that the Universe is just a cesspit and the stars and planets no more than ordure . . ."

He said, "I want to know everything."

"I've told you everything there is to know," I said.

He smiled sadly, pulled out a chair and sat down. He lifted a hand in oddly imperious gesture. Susie herself waddled over to our table, took his order. She returned with a bottle of imported whiskey—not the real Scotch, but that distilled on Nova Caledon is close enough—and a couple of clean glasses, set them down before us and smiled fatly. She treated the little monkey, as I was regarding him, with a deference that I found annoying.

Halvorsen poured each of us a drink. He raised his glass and said, "To the key . . ." He drank, and I drank.

"What key?" I asked.

"The key that I am looking for," he replied.

"I haven't got it," I said.

"You can help me to find it," he told me.

"What the hell is all this about?" I demanded.

He said, making a statement rather than asking a question, "You're Charles Merrill, aren't you?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"You hold a Master Astronaut's Certificate of Competency. You were, until recently, Second Officer of the *Rimbird*. Prior to that you were with the Trans Galactic Clippers . . ."

"So," I cracked brilliantly, "what?"

"So I need a Master Astro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

naut. I'm willing to pay handsomely for your services."

"Listen," I said, "I've had Space. I've had Space in a big way. I'm sick of tank-grown food and recirculated air and water. When I paid off from the *Rimbird* I swore that I'd never set foot in a spaceship again, and I meant it."

"Times have changed since then," he remarked. "You paid off from the *Rimbird* to get married, to find yourself a shore job. But the girl didn't marry you, and so you never got that sinecure in her father's business. You're polishing an office stool with the seat of your pants and hating it. You come in here every Friday night to get a load on and to swap stories with your old shipmates."

It was true, but nobody likes being told the truth. I was tempted to let him have what remained in my glass full in the face, but thought better of it. Fat Susie was watching us, and Susie, for some reason, had always been willing to give me credit. Susie, I had observed over the past few months, deplored rowdiness in her establishment and did her utmost to discourage it. I decided that I did not want to get in Susie's bad books.

"And who the hell are *you*, anyhow?" I asked him.

"My name is Halvorsen," he said quietly.

"Never heard of you," I grunted. "Not that I particularly want to."

He smiled, and looked more like a sad little monkey than ever. "Such is fame," he sighed. "You must have seen my name every day of your life, Mr. Merrill — aboard your ships, on every civilized planet."

"Sorry," I said insincerely, "it rings no bell." I got to my feet. "Excuse me. I want to shake hands with an old friend."

Halvorsen looked at me inquiringly when I came back.

"So," I sneered as I sat down, "you're *that* Halvorsen. Halvorsen, the Outhouse King, sitting on his throne of vitrified porcelain . . ."

He flushed. He said, "I'm a rich man, Mr. Merrill, but how I made my money is of no importance, except that it was made honestly. I'm a rich man, and I pay well. At the moment, I need a yachtmaster. Levin, who was my captain, got himself knocked down by a ground car on the day after we arrived here and will be in hospital for months yet."

"I've had Space," I told him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again, "in a big way. In any case, I've no desire to become a hired hand, a . . . a *flunkey*."

"If you take the job," he assured me, "you'll be no more a flunkey than my secretary, or my physician."

"You can call me Admiral," I said, "with pay and uniform to match, and I'll still not be interested. Take my tip and go to see old Grimes, the Astronautical Superintendent of Rim Runners. He may be able to loan you an officer."

"I've already seen Commodore Grimes," said Halvorsen. "He told me that he's very short of officers at the moment, and that all his officers are under contract and can't be released. He told me about you, and the places where I'd be likely to find you on a Friday night."

"So he told you about me," I growled. "What did he tell you? 'One of our most promising young officers, who threw away his career for a floosie?' Or did he say that I was a no-hoper and no loss to Rim Runners?"

"He said," replied Halvorsen, "that you were a good man gone wrong, and that you were in crying need of rehabilitation."

"You can take your rehabilitation," I started to say, "and . . ."

It was the look of contempt in the girl's eyes that stopped me. She had come in without my noticing her and was now standing behind Halvorsen. If he was a monkey, she was a cat. She had the slim sleekness of the well-bred Siamese, and something of the same coloring, and her blue eyes held only feline disdain. *Who is this drunken bum?* she seemed to ask, although her wide, scarlet mouth did not move.

Halvorsen saw me staring at her, half-turned in his chair.

"Leona," he said, his face lighting up. He sprang to his feet. Clumsily, unwillingly, I followed suit. "Mr. Merrill, I'd like you to meet my secretary, Miss Leona Wayne. Leona, this is Mr. Merrill, whom I hope to persuade to take Captain Levin's place."

She acknowledged the introduction and heard the news without enthusiasm.

"*Starmaid* runs herself, Mr. Halvorsen," she stated coldly. "Even I can handle her."

"Can you handle an emergency?" I asked her.

"Can *you?*" she countered.

"That's my job," I said.

Halvorsen bustled off and brought back a chair from another table. He fussed around

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leona as she sat down. I resumed my own seat. All the time the girl's cold eyes were fixed on mine. Already I was beginning to hate her — the coolness of her, the sleekness, the plain, expensive clothing that achieved effect by cut rather than by ornamentation, the slender elegance of the body that was its foundation.

"I've heard about these ships that run themselves," I said. "Lloyd's of London won't touch them with a barge pole, and Federation astronautical law insists that at least one Master Astronaut be carried lest they became a menace to decent commercial shipping."

"One needn't insure with Lloyd's," she said. "We don't deal with them."

"You still have to observe Federation law," I told her. "Even here. Even on The Rim."

"A pity," she said.

"How soon can you join?" asked Halvorsen, breaking into the *tete-a-tete*.

"I haven't said that I am joining," I said.

"Don't press him," said the girl.

"I should give a month's notice to my present employers," I said.

"I," Halvorsen assured me, "am not without influence. Can you join tonight? We can get your name on the Register tomorrow."

"What's the job worth?" I asked, hoping to deepen the expression of disgust on the girl's face. My hope was realized.

Halvorsen told me. He named a figure that would have made the Master of an *Alpha Class* liner envious. He promised free transportation, First Class, to any part of the Galaxy on the termination of my employment and my reinstatement, if I so desired, in T. G. Clippers. More for the hell of it than anything else I pressed for a uniform allowance over and above my handsome salary. Halvorsen did not quibble. His secretary looked as though she would be paying for everything out of her own pocket.

We left *Susie's Bar and Grill* shortly thereafter. Big, fat Susie bowed us to the door, treating Halvorsen as though he were royalty—as, in a sense, he was. Did not every human and humanoid in the Galaxy pay him tribute at least once daily? There was a chauffeur-driven hired car waiting outside, its gyroscope humming softly. The driver opened the door of the passenger cabin with a flourish. Leona Wayne climbed first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the monowheel; I stood back to let Halvorsen follow her, but he urged me to take precedence. I sat down beside the girl. She edged away from me. At once I was acutely conscious of my shabby clothing, my long unpolished shoes, the fact that I had let three days go by without using depilatory cream.

Halvorsen seated himself on the other side of me.

"Where to, Mr. Halvorsen?" asked the driver.

"The spaceport," answered my new employer.

We skimmed through the narrow streets of the Pleasure Quarter, through the bright, meretricious glare of neon signs, through the waves of trite, tawdry music that billowed out through the open doors of bars and night clubs. Then we were among the warehouses, black cliffs that towered up, on either hand, to the black sky. The few sparse lights served only to accentuate their blackness, as did the faint, far nebulosities in the empty, Rim World firmament, glimpsed now and again from the bottom of our man-made canyon. Old newspapers, driving before the omnipresent bitter wind, gleamed in the beam of our headlamp like soiled, white birds. Ahead of us, growing brighter, was the harsh brilliance of working lights, the spaceport.

We swept through the gate after only cursory formalities. We passed the gleaming tower that was *Rimhound,* loading for Ultimo, Thule and Faraway. We rolled past the berth in which *Rimbird* was discharging the merchandise she had loaded on the Eastern Circuit—Stree, Mellise, Tharn and Grollor. We left behind us the whining, snarling machinery, the busy conveyor belts, cranes and gantries. We ran out to an almost unused corner of the field, threading our way through and among towering piles of junk.

My first impression of *Starmaid* was of smallness. She was dwarfed by an upended tube liner—one of those from the Trans Galactic Clipper *Thermopylae,* left at Port Forlorn after she had put in for repairs—was hardly bigger than an almost porous propellant tank discarded from some other ship.

My second impression was of cleanliness and of neatness. *Starmaid* would have looked neat and clean in any surroundings, but she lost nothing by contrast with the interstellar junk with which she was surrounded. I realized

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I had lived for too long without love, and that this little ship would do much to fill the emotional vacuum.

We got out of the car, stepped down to the dirty, scarred concrete. Halvorsen walked briskly to the airlock door, fussed with the combination lock. There was about him the air, outrageously incongruous, of the suburban householder returning home after a party. He got the door open, stood to one side. Leona Wayne went to enter, but he put out a restraining hand.

He said, "This is only a little ship, but I like to observe naval etiquette. The Master takes precedence over the Purser when boarding."

"And over the Owner?" I asked.

"Over the Bio-Chemist," he replied. "There are no idlers aboard *Starmaid.* After you, Captain Merrill."

"Thank you." I replied.

I walked first into the little airlock, hardly larger than a telephone booth, ignoring the venomous glance that Leona Wayne shot in my direction. Once inside the ship I insisted that Halvorsen take the lead —after all, he knew his way around; I didn't. The drive had sobered me up and I was able to take an intelligent interest in all that I saw.

She was more than just a little ship. She was a big ship —and a big ship of the better class, at that—in miniature. She had everything, including gear that was still too expensive to be built into the T. G. Clippers or the Commission's liners. There was, for example, a set of remote controls so that the Mannschenn Drive unit could be operated from the Reaction engine room, and another allowing the rockets to be controlled from the Interstellar Drive compartment. (This, however, was necessary, since *Starmaid* carried only one Engineer, he being qualified to take charge of both propulsive systems.) The galley, Leona Wayne's domain (she was Catering Officer as well as Purser) was a gleaming miracle of automation. There was automatic monitoring for the yeast and tissue culture vats and the hydrophonics tanks—but this, Halvorsen confessed, was usually disconnected as he enjoyed pottering.

We went up to the Control Room before we inspected the accommodation. This was in keeping with the rest of the ship. There were such luxuries as Mass Proximity Indicators, usually found only in the Survey Fleet. There was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a Mark VII Geigenheim Electronic Navigator—and this, I knew, would be capable of taking *Starmaid* from one side of the Galaxy to the other. I resolved to do the same as Halvorsen had done with his electronic monitors. The Geigenheim made the ship intelligent—but she still had no imagination, and it is imagination alone that keeps Man superior to the thinking machines of his own making. It wasn't all mechanical.

We looked into the Radio Office. I was rather surprised to see that there was no dividing line drawn between electronic and psionic radio—the dog's brain amplifier was out of place among the severely utilitarian transceivers and radar gear. Halvorsen explained that there had been more doubling up, that his Communications Officer was one of those rare people who, in addition to their telepathic talents, have the ability to comprehend and to cope with electronic equipment. It was clear that nothing but the best was good enough for my new employer. I began to feel acutely conscious of my own shortcomings and began to wonder what was the urgency, why he could not wait for the recovery of Captain Levin who, to judge by the standards of his shipmates, must have been an outstanding astronaut.

I raised the point a little later when the three of us were sitting in the small, beautifully furnished saloon, drinking the excellent coffee that Leona had made.

"I'm an old man, Captain Merrill," said Halvorsen. "I'm an old man, and beginning to get impatient. There's so much that I want to know before I go . . ."

"Is it that key you're looking for?" I asked.

"Yes. I'm looking for the key. I want to find out, if I can, if there's any meaning to the Universe, any meaning to life. I've already spent a fortune hiring other men's brains; they've come up with all sorts of fancy variations of the Unified Field Theory, but not one of them makes any real sense . . ."

"The Halvorsen Foundation . . ." I said. "I should have remembered."

"Yes. The Halvorsen Foundation, set up to discover what we are, *why* we are. I'm tired of waiting for the scientists to cook up any sort of intelligible answer and so I decided to find out for myself. I thought that I might find the key out here on the Rim, out here where our expanding, explod-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing Galaxy is pressing against the ultimate nothingness . . ."

"But what *are* you looking for?" I asked.

He hesitated before replying. He asked, "Are you a religious man?"

"No," I said truthfully.

"Then you have an open mind, presumably. I hope so—although I have found atheists to be as savagely intolerant as deists. But if you're an agnostic . . ."

"I am," I interrupted.

"Good. I've become rather hesitant abut mentioning my current line of research before strangers. The deists accuse me of blasphemy, of impious prying into secrets that were never meant to be revealed; the atheists accuse me of trying to bolster up archaic superstitions. Be that as it may, what I'm investigating is the continuous creation of matter. It was Hoyle, a Twentieth Century astronomer, who first stumbled onto it, who put forward the theory that there was a continual influx of new hydrogen atoms into the Universe from . . . from *somewhere*. Hydrogen atoms, the very building blocks of all matter. The theory was never disproved and in Hoyle's time, when the average scientist tended to be something of a mystic, was quite widely accepted. But mysticism is frowned upon now and Hoyle's theory of continuous creation has been explained away. The Galaxy is expanding, they tell us, and as all Space is filled with hydrogen atoms it is only natural that there should be an apparent influx.

"That explanation never satisfied me. I had *Starmaid* built to my own specifications, recruited her crew. I brought her out to the Rim. I ran out past the Rim, beyond the Rim —fifty light years, a hundred, two hundred, a thousand . . ."

"It seemed like a thousand years," said the girl. "Years, not light years . . . They complain of the cold and the dark on these Rim Worlds; they don't know what the words mean."

"There was emptiness," said Halvorsen, "an emptiness far beyond anything found in interstellar space. I doubt if there was one atom to a million cubic miles, and my Mass Proximity Indicator is fantastically sensitive. It was obvious that the hydrogen atoms aren't being swept in from Outside, equally obvious that this continuous creation is a phenomenon confined to the Galaxy—and, it could be, to the other Galaxies . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What do you hope to find?" I asked. "And where do you hope to find it?"

"There is one answer to both questions," he said. "I don't know. But I have heard of the philosophical lizards of Stree, and it may be that they will be able to give me some clue. I want to leave for Stree tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"The ship is fully stored and bunkered, *Captain* Merrill," said the girl. "All that is required is the legal formality of placing your name on the Register. If you've forgotten all you ever knew of pilotage and navigation it doesn't matter; as I've already told you, the ship can handle herself if need be."

"I've not forgotten," I said sharply. I turned to Halvorsen. "There are things that have to be checked, sir. There are my own personal affairs to wind up . . ."

"You can be ready by tomorrow evening," he told me.

"*This* evening," said Leona Wayne, looking at her watch.

"This evening," amended Halvorsen.

I was.

I was ready, and *Starmaid* was ready, and we lifted from Port Forlorn at precisely 1900 hours, Local Time. It had been a rush getting all secured for Space. There were the legal formalities—and didn't somebody once remark that the tide runs sluggishly through official channels? There were my own private affairs to be clewed up, and there was the thorough inspection of the ship and all her gear that I insisted upon before I would take over.

The most important event of the day, I think, was the visit to Captain Levin in the Port Forlorn hospital. He was not the man that I had expected to find; I had visualized somebody much older, somebody with the manner and appearance of a senior master in the Trans Galactic Clippers or the Interstellar Transport Commission. He was a young man, hardly older than myself. He was frankly envious of me, and he was willing to talk.

"They're a good crowd," he told me. "Leona's only fault is her damned snootiness, her refusal to make allowances for human frailties. But she's a good cook and a good Purser, and she can navigate as well as you or I. The Old Boy's harmless enough—and I'd always be willing to sign him on as Bio-Chemist if he lost his fortune and had to work for a living again. Doc Rayner is pretty harmless—the only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trouble with *him* is that he's too engrossed in keeping Halvorsen alive and kicking to worry much about us lesser mortals. He's a geriatrician, of course, one of *the* geriatricians, so anybody on the sunny side of seventy isn't of much interest to him. Then there's Cressy. If he isn't thinking about electronics he's thinking about psionics, and if he isn't thinking about either he's thinking about both. Leave him to his printed circuits and his dog's brain in aspic and he's quite happy. MacIlwraith can be hard to get on with. He's one of those engineers with the odd idea that the ship exists only to house her precious machinery. He'll always do what you want, though, even if he's apt to run screaming to Halvorsen about it afterwards . . ."

I met them all during the day. Rayner looked as though he himself were in crying need of the services of a geriatrician. He looked older than his patient, was no more than a perambulatory assemblage of brittle bones held together by dried skin and sinew. Cressy was only a youngster —the sort of youngster who wears pebble-lensed spectacles and has become a junior chess champion long before the onset of puberty. MacIlwraith was a hulking, carrot-topped brute who must have had Neanderthalers in his ancestry. He made it clear to me from the start that I was only a Control Room ornament and inessential to the real work of the ship. He took orders, however, albeit grudgingly. He would have been far happier if those orders had come directly from the Owner and not from a mere Master, such as I represented.

This, then, was my crew. This was the crew of the sweet, shining *Starmaid.* This was the little company that was dedicated to the search for . . . for *something* in the realms of the eternal *nothing.* I was dedicated to the same search, even though I knew that it was crazy. A man will do a lot for money. A man will do a lot—let us admit it—for the chance to get back into Space again.

At 1900 hours we lifted. At 1845 I was sitting in my acceleration chair in Control, looking out through the wide viewports. There was little to see—a chill drizzle had swept down from the hills to enshroud Port Forlorn. Dimly I could make out the glare of the working lights around *Rimbird* and *Rimhound,* the fainter glow of the city a little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beyond them. Overhead the sky was overcast.

Halvorsen was in the special chair that he had caused to be installed in *Starmaid's* control room—it was well to one side and out of the way. Leona Wayne was sitting in the Navigator's chair. This was the first ship in which I had served in which the purser was interested in navigation; but there has to be, I told myself, a first time for anything.

She handled the pre-blast-off exchanges with the Control Tower competently enough, made the routine checks without hesitation. I could not fault her counting down.

"Zero!" she said at last.

Starmaid lifted, obedient to my fingers on the controls. She lifted, and the glare of her exhaust was reflected from the clouds through which we drove. She lifted, but slowly—I was remembering the old, brittle bones of Halvorsen, my employer, the old, brittle bones of Rayner, the Surgeon. Too, *Starmaid* was not a commercial ship; there was no need for me to conserve reaction mass by getting upstairs in as big a hurry as the structural members would stand. She lifted, and with every mile of gained altitude I was getting the feel of her. By the time that we were clear of the overcast I was beginning to think that I was her Master in fact as well as in name.

Halvorsen smiled at me, saying, "She's a sweet little ship."

"I'm finding that out," I replied.

"She is also," remarked Leona Wayne coldly, "a tough ship. She doesn't need to be babied."

I swallowed the hot retort, returning my attention to the instruments. If there had to be ill feeling, I would not be its initiator. I made sure that the needle of the accelerometer stayed steadily on the Half G graduation, affected a great show of interest in the skin temperature gauges. I was conscious all the time of the girl's cold eyes on my every action. I wondered if my predecessor had had to put up with this tacit back-seat driving.

Lorn was no more than a great, misty ball below us. Ahead was the blackness, with the sparse pinpoints of light that were stars, of Outer Space; out to starboard was the glowing lens of the Galaxy. I cut the Drive, letting *Starmaid's* momentum carry her up and out. I actuated the gyroscopes, watched the cart-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wheel sight in the very nose of the ship swing slowly towards the glowing, orange speck that was the sun around which Stree revolved.

Dimly I was aware of a slender hand holding a sheet of paper before my nose. Irritated, I snapped, "What is it?"

"The coordinates of our trajectory," replied Leona Wayne. "I fed the data into the Geigenheim while you were so busy piloting."

"Thanks," I said, "but I'll not be needing the Geigenheim for this run. It's no more than the shortest distance between two points with nothing in the way . . ."

"How do you know there's not?" she demanded.

"Miss Wayne," I growled, "I've been on the Eastern Circuit for over eighteen months. There's not so much as a swarm of micro-meteorites between Lorn and Stree."

I juggled with the gyroscope controls, put the orange star in the exact center of the sights, held it there. I sounded the acceleration alarm, fired all tubes. I let the speed build up gradually, never exceeding one gravity acceleration. Lorn was well astern when I cut the rockets and ordered the Mannschenn Drive started.

The journey from Lorn to Stree is not a long one, in terms of subjective time—the direct journey, that is; it's long enough when you have stoppages for loading and discharge on Tharn, Grollor and Mellise, with the consequent detours. It wasn't a long voyage for *Starmaid.* It was hardly long enough for me to get to know my new shipmates properly—and *Starmaid* was a ship in which all hands tended to do their own jobs quietly and efficiently with little inclination for social intercourse.

When he was not busy with his not very onerous duties as Bio-Chemist old Halvorsen shut himself in his cabin, studying the tapes that he had bought on Lorn concerning Stree. MacIlwraith, the Engineer, lived for and with his smoothly functioning machinery. Cressy spent all his time telepathically nattering with his colleagues in other ships and shore stations throughout the Galaxy. Old Doctor Rayner had little enough to do, but he sought nobody's company and seemed happy enough cataloging his stamp collection.

Then, of course, there was Leona. Her hobby—if hobby it could be called—was the pursuit and the destruction of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dirt. Her galley was spotless, as were her storerooms. Her little office was almost impossibly tidy. The small public rooms gleamed from deck to deckhead. With this I had no fault to find—but when, one day, I came into the Control Room to make a routine check of her position and found her dusting and polishing I decided that it was time to draw a line.

"Please," I said, "leave the Control Room alone." I pulled myself across to the navigator's desk, which had been cleared of all books and papers. "Where is my work book? Where are the tables and the ephemerae?"

"In the drawers where they belong," she replied shortly.

"Miss Wayne," I told her, "I appreciate what you've done in here. Really I do," I went on, lying diplomatically. "But I'm an untidy man, and I know it, and I have my own filing system. When things are left *my* way I can find anything I want in a split microsecond. Now . . ."

"And now you can't, I suppose!" she flared. "Captain Merrill, I don't see how you can live and work in such filth!"

"Filth?" I asked mildly. "Isn't that rather a strong word? Absurdly strong? After all, there's clean dirt and dirty dirt, and a slight untidiness can hardly be classed as either . . ."

"A slight untidiness? And what about the cigarette ash over everything? What about that?"

"It does no harm. It has occurred to me, though, that our employer could devote his time and his genius to inventing a really efficient Free Fall ashtray . . ."

"So now," she accused me, "you're sneering at Mr. Halvorsen, the man who picked you up off the beach and gave you a job . . ."

"I had a job at the time," I reminded her. "I have nothing against Mr. Halvorsen—but, after all, I was doing him the favor, not the other way round."

"That," she said, "doesn't give you the right to turn this ship into a pigsty."

"Get this straight," I told her, "the only person in a ship in Deep Space who has any rights is the Master—even the Master of a yacht, even when the Owner's aboard. The Master has the right to keep his Control Room in whatever condition of untidiness he pleases. I am exercising that right now. Will you please leave, Miss Wayne, and take

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your polishing rags with you?"

I didn't think that it was an excessively harsh reprimand —after all, I'd often heard far harsher ones delivered by irate Masters to female members of their crews. After all, when women come into Deep Space, with the rank and pay of spacemen, they must expect to take the rough with the smooth. I was rather congratulating myself for not having flown off the handle properly, was pulling books and papers from the drawers and sliding them under the elastic webbing of the table in my usual untidy manner, when I heard a sniffling sound.

I looked around. I was surprised and shocked to see that Leona Wayne, the icily calm, efficient Miss Wayne, was sobbing.

Damn it all, I thought, she's the Purser. She can't expect to be handled as though she's labeled *Fragile* top, sides and bottom. She's trodden on my corns, and she's had her corns trodden on in return, and so what?

"Miss Wayne," I heard myself saying, "if I said anything to upset you, I apologize . . ."

"It's not what you've said, you stupid brute!" she wailed. "It's what you've done. This was such a nice, clean, *tidy* ship before you came here. And now . . ."

Somehow, I was holding her, and she was sniffling damply between my neck and my shoulder. I remember what little I had seen of Levin, the slight aura of effeminacy that had hung around him—not that he was any worse a spaceman for that. I thought of the old-maidish MacIlwraith and the equally old-maidish Rayner—and, come to that, old Halvorsen had a certain prissiness about him . . . And there was Cressy, with his love of gossip—even if it was intra-Galactic gossip . . . And when I joined the ship I had sensed, subconsciously, that all those in her were house-proud rather than ship-proud. (And yet Leona had taken care to impress upon me that *Starmaid* was a tough ship . . .)

So she didn't like dirt and untidiness, and she had shipped away in a yacht full of fussy, old-maidish bachelors, and then I'd come, with my slovenly habits, and had assumed the role of the proverbial bull in the china shop, the serpent in a hitherto gleaming and spotless Eden. It was just too bad, and I had no intention of promising to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mend my ways. (I might try to mend them, but that would depend to a large extent upon the outcome of events. I raised her tear-stained face and I kissed her, and thought that I might, perhaps, try to keep my desk a little tidier and to dispose of my cigarette ash in the receptacles provided . . .)

She said, "But you must remember, Charles, you must try to remember how much I hate dirt and untidiness. It's almost a phobia with me. That's why I agreed to come away in this yacht when all the other secretaries, senior to me, had turned the chance down. Space is so *clean* . . ."

I said that I'd try to remember—and it wasn't a case of anything for a quiet life either. I had realized suddenly that I'd wanted the girl ever since my first sight of her.

The others accepted the situation philosophically enough. I was half afraid that there would be jealousies and resentments, but I need not have worried on that score. I don't think that any of them was interested, even. Each had his own interests, and sex was not among them. His engines were MacIlwraith's shining mistresses, and so long as Cressy could indulge in his neighborly, back-fence gossip with other telepaths, *he* was happy. The Doctor had his stamp collection, and the only female in old Halvorsen's life was that naked Truth who, in the old legends, was alleged to live at the bottom of a well.

(And how close to the actuality those old legends were, we had no idea!)

As for me—I was lucky, and I knew it. I had a ship and I had a woman, and what more can a man ask? True, the woman was over-insistent upon cleanliness and tidiness, but that was a small fault. I could endure that for the sake of all the rest. And after all—until men are capable of building the perfect ship what right have they to expect the perfect woman?

And so, as the subjective days passed, we fell towards Stree. Both Leona and I were sorry when my observations showed me that it was time to return to the normal continuum, time to throw ourselves into an orbit around the planet and to maneuver the ship into her landing spiral.

But there was Stree below us—an ochreous ball, mainly barren rock and desert. There were the signals coming in, loud and clear, from the beacon at Port Grimes. There was the sibilant voice of Stressor,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Rim Runners' Agent, saying, "*Starmaid*, your request received. You may land."

We came in, dropping through the clear, arid atmosphere, dropping down to the expanse of arid sand that was the spaceport. We came in, with *Starmaid* obedient to my hand on the controls, with Leona sitting at my side and reframing, now, from back-seat driving, with old Halvorsen beaming at us like a benevolent, wise old monkey. We came in slowly, balancing atop the pillar of fire that was our interplanetary drive, falling gently to the circle of fused slag that showed where the backblasts of *Faraway Quest*, of *Lorn Lady*, of *Rimbird*, *Rimhound*, *Rimfire* and *Jolly Swagman* had splashed and spread over the surface.

We landed gently, softly. I cut the drive, pressed the switch that would make the *Finished with Engines* signal in the engine room.

"We're here," I said, unnecessarily.

I looked through the viewport. I saw Stressor hurrying out of the Port Master's office, looking, from this distance, like one of the dinosaurs that were once the dominant life form on at least a thousand worlds, that would still be the dominant life form if they had learned to adapt themselves, as had Stressor's ancestors.

"What—I mean *who*—is that?" asked Halvorsen.

"That's Stressor," I said. "You heard his voice on the R/T when we asked permission to land. He's Rim Runners' local agent."

"You're familiar with these people, Captain Merrill," said Halvorsen. "I'll leave it to you to do the honors."

"As you please, Mr. Halvorsen," I replied. Then, to Leona, "You'd better put the kettle on. The Streen love a friendly chat over the teacups."

I went down to the airlock. Stressor was surprised to see me. He clasped my hand in both of his, the rough scales bruising my skin.

"Mr. Merrill—or should I say Captain Merrill? This is indeed a pleasure! I was told that you had left the service."

"I had," I said. "But I came back. Welcome aboard, Stressor. Will you join us for tea?"

"You are gracious."

He got through our little airlock with some difficulty, followed me up to the saloon. I introduced him to Halvorsen, and then to Leona who came in from the pantry with the tea things. I told him that *Starmaid* was not a trading vessel, and he found the con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cept of a private yacht rather difficult to grasp.

"But," he said, "you must have come here for *something*."

"We did," averred Halvorsen. "Knowledge."

"Knowledge?" This was something that a native of Stree could understand. "Then you have come to the right world, Mr. Halvorsen. Knowledge is the one commodity in which we are rich."

"Then you can help me?" asked Halvorsen.

"What knowledge do you want?" asked the native.

"There must be some . . . some key to the secret of the Universe," said Halvorsen. "Have you got it?"

Stressor delicately sipped his tea, the cup looking tiny and fragile in his talons, against his gaping, needle-toothed mouth. He said, "There is a key; we have known that for generations. We have discussed it for as many generations. Some of our philosophers say that they know what it is, say that what they have learned of human customs since our first contact with your race has given them the answer. There are those of us who cannot accept that answer, myself among them. We are not, as Captain Merrill will tell you, an overly proud people—but even humility has its limits . . ."

Halvorsen's eyes were shining.

"What *is* the key?" he demanded.

"Sir," Stressor replied stiffly, "I will not tell you. I, like you, am an intelligent being, and feel that this universe was created so that intelligent beings might appreciate it, come to a full understanding of it. All I can suggest is that you see Ossan. He is too old to have much pride left . . ."

"Can you bring him here?" asked Halvorsen.

"He is too old to travel," said Stressor.

As Stressor had told us, the Streen are not an overly proud people. They consider it no disgrace to act as beasts of burden. So it was that the following day, early, Halvorsen, Leona and myself, riding in saddles strapped to the backs of three of the Streen, set out for the rugged, hilly country in which Ossan lived. Stressor came with us, laden with gifts for the ancient philosopher as well as with our own food supplies, leading what could, incorrectly, be called the cavalcade. The mode of transport was not too uncomfortable—but it is rather disconcerting to be expected to carry on a

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conversation with the animal you are riding . . .

It was late afternoon when we reached the cave in which Ossan lived—a dark hole in a sheer cliff of red sandstone. He came shambling into the sunlight, blinking his filmed eyes. The scales of his body were flaking, crumbling almost, and the dry, musty stench of him was overpowering. He said something that was all clicks and hisses. Stressor replied in kind.

My mount turned his great, reptilian head on the long neck and said, "You can get down, Captain Merrill. Ossan has said that he will talk to you."

We got down, glad enough of the chance to stretch our legs. We took advantage of the slight breeze and stood to windward of the aged Streen, watched while Stressor displayed the gifts that we had brought—the tea, the sugar, the books. Halvorsen looked disappointed when the lizard philosopher displayed no great interest in the latter. The hissing, clicking conversation continued.

Stressor at last translated. "Ossan says," he told us, "that first of all you must tell him all about yourselves—who you are, what you are, what you have seen. He says that you Earthmen brought the idea of trade to this world, and that he will trade knowledge for knowledge, ideas for ideas."

So we spread our sleeping bags—they had been carried in Stressor's pack—on the hard rock and sat down. Halvorsen talked first, with lengthy pauses for translation. He told of his humble youth as a plumber, of the invention of the first really satisfactory Free Fall toilet that had brought him fame—and to have one's name spread throughout the Galaxy in every ship is fame—and fortune. He talked of the intricacies of finance, of the problems of manufacture. He talked of the Foundation that bore his name and that had yet to make any real contribution to the knowledge of mankind.

It was my turn next. I talked of the worlds I had seen, of the people I had met, of life in the starships. Had Leona not been there I might have talked of the women I had known.

When Leona told her story it was dark, and the few, faint stars were shining in the black sky. It was dark, and it was cold, and Stressor broke out the efficient little heater from his pack and set it up so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that we all derived some benefit from the warmth. He made tea, too, and we sipped the hot fluid gratefully. After he had finished his cup the old philosopher hissed a few words to the agent, turned and vanished into his cave.

"He," said Stressor, "will talk in the morning."

After a not very satisfying supper we crawled into our bags and tried to sleep, both Leona and myself resenting the presence of our employer and the great lizards.

Morning came, the sun striking our faces like a blow.

For a long, hazy moment I was completely bewildered, thought that I was recovering from a night's debauch, sleeping in some gutter in Port Forlorn. I opened my eyes and saw the red cliffs, the clear sky. I saw Leona emerging from the cocoon of her sleeping bag, still neat and unruffled in spite of the primitive conditions in which we had slept. I saw Halvorsen stretching his arms and yawning, looking not like a wise old ape but, at this moment, like an exceptionally stupid one. I saw Stressor and the three Streen who had carried us, rising from the hollow in the rocks where, curled lizardlike, they had slept.

Leona went to our supply pack, got out cleansing tissues, comb and mirror, wandered a little way down the ravine to where a bend hid her from sight. While she was gone I busied myself with our portable stove, with water and tea, with self-heating cans of rations. The Streen watched with interest but no envy. Our food was unpalatable to them and, reptiles that they were, they could go for weeks without sustenance. Even so, they had become addicted to tea and when the boiling water was poured over the leaves their wide nostrils began to twitch.

Halvorsen got out of his bag and went along the ravine in the opposite direction to that taken by Leona. Stressor said, "That is one thing that we have in common with you Earthmen—a desire for privacy on certain occasions." I didn't feel in a very philosophical mood, grunted a curt acknowledgement. I knew Stressor of old, knew that with very little encouragement he would deliver a long and boring lecture on sanitation as practised in various parts of the Galaxy, the bulk of the material garnered from the tapes and books that Rim Runners' ships had brought to his world.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a scrabbling noise inside the cave. Old Ossan emerged, looking more like a dinosaur that should have been extinct a million years ago than like one of the thinkers of his world.

He said simply, "I smell tea."

"But he can't speak English!" I exclaimed.

"He can," said Stressor, "when he wants to. This is one of the times."

"Give me some tea," demanded the ancient Streen.

I poured him a cup. He took it in his claws, drained it, almost boiling that it was. He held it to me to be refilled. He was gulping his third cup when Halvorsen and Leona returned.

"I am ready to talk," he said. "Listen carefully. You will not find what you search on the Rim. Your Key is not here. North you must run, and North again, North from the Center. There, I think, you will find the Key. This I ask —that you let me know what it is that you find. I would know, before I die, if my theory is correct."

"What is your theory?" asked Halvorsen.

Ossan was silent.

"We are a humble people," said Stressor, "but we have our pride. We hope that Ossan's theory is wrong. We hope that you will be able to prove that it is wrong."

And that was all that we could get out of any of them. There was some sort of tabu involved—but what it was we could not determine. Bribery was useless and we were in no position to make threats even if we had been so foolhardy as to ignore Federation law. So we said good-bye—without reluctance on the part of either Leona or myself—and let our carriers take us back to the ship.

Bitterly I resented Halvorsen's demon, the demon that was driving him so far and so fast in the pursuit of knowledge, the demon that was driving all of us so far and fast. Sun after sun we passed, world after world, planets that we had never seen before and might never have the chance to see again. The ship reeked of hot oil and metal and our combined body odors, efficient though her air conditioning system was. At no spaceport did we halt for more than the bare minimum of time necessary for us to replenish exhausted supplies. Had Halvorsen not been a heavy smoker I doubt that we should have halted at all—for all essentials *Starmaid* was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a self-contained, self-perpetuating unit.

It should have been a honeymoon voyage for Leona and myself, but it was not. We, like the ship, like all in her, were too hard driven. Our tempers became frayed and we began to snap at each other. I forgot to maintain the standards of neatness upon which Leona had always insisted, and that made matters worse, so much so that my lapses became deliberate instead of accidental.

And so we drove on, across the Galaxy, across the northern "surface" of the great Lens. We landed at last on Polaria, a world as bleak and desolate as any of the Rim Worlds, a world whose sparsely settled Northern Hemisphere looked always to the Ultimate Night. But it was not the emptiness of the sky that made that hemisphere unpopular—because the night sky was far from empty. It was alive with flowing, coalescing shapes, with great curtains and streamers of cold flame. It was beautiful—and frightening. It was something to marvel at, to admire—but not to live with. It was something to be explained scientifically that, in spite of the scientific explanations, still evoked a feeling of superstitious terror.

We made our landing in the North, although there was no spaceport there. We set *Starmaid* down on a great, level field of ice, staying her off against the perpetual bitter winds. We helped Halvorsen and Cressy to set up their instruments outside the ship, instruments that were, to me, a complete enigma. We watched MacIlwraith doing inexplicable things to his Mannschenn Drive unit. We left the specialists to their mysteries, went to talk with the old Doctor.

He said, "I'm an old man, Merrill, and I thought that I had lost the capacity to be afraid of anything—but I'm scared. I'm a scientist of sorts, Merrill, and until now I've always thought that there should be no limit to Man's knowledge—but now I'm no longer sure of that . . ."

"But what are they doing, Dr. Rayner?" asked the girl. "What are they doing?"

"Mr. Halvorsen thinks," replied the Doctor, "that this is one of the sources from which the continuously created hydrogen atoms flow into the Universe. He has set up meters to measure that flow."

"I guessed that," I said. "But what is MacIlwraith do-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing to the Drive? I know that I'm only the Captain, but I think that I'm entitled to some word of explanation from the Chief Engineer."

"I can only guess," said the old man. "I heard them talking about it some time ago, before you joined us. Halvorsen reasoned that the influx of primal matter must be from some other dimension, and MacIlwraith believes that it will be possible to adjust the Drive so that *Starmaid* can stem the stream, follow it to its real source."

"Interdimensional travel is impossible," I said. "Like Time Travel, it's just something that science fiction writers play with."

The Doctor bared his teeth in a ghastly grin. "That's just what the Twentieth Century rocketeers must have said about the Faster Than Light Drive. Me, I know MacIlwraith well enough to be scared."

"And I'm scared," said Leona, drawing closer to me.

"I'm not," I declared, not too untruthfully. "I'm annoyed. Legally speaking, I'm the Lord and Master of this wagon, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Halvorsen is the Owner. I resent being kept in the dark."

"And what," asked a fresh voice, "do you intend doing about it, Captain Merrill?"

I turned abruptly, saw our employer's figure framed in the doorway. He was still wearing the synthefurs that had protected him from the cold while he worked outside, although he had removed the gloves and thrown back the hood. His face was glowing with color. He looked almost a young man, far younger than Dr. Rayner's ministrations could ever have made him.

"Mr. Halvorsen," I said, "I demand an explanation. I am Master of this ship, and I have discovered that Mr. MacIlwraith is doing something to the most important of her propulsive units that could not, so far as I can gather, be classed as routine overhaul. In my opinion, he is jeopardizing the safety of the vessel."

"Are you an engineer, Captain Merrill?"

"No—but the fact that I hold a Master's certificate gives me a smattering of engineering knowledge."

"A smattering . . . Captain Merrill, you are under contract. Your contract binds you to take the ship from Point A to Point B, as required by the Owner. I am the Owner. Should you refuse to carry out my instructions I could,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the MF laws. What had begun as a popular reaction against 'subliminal living' and the uncontrolled extension of techniques of mass manipulation for political and economic ends had quickly developed into a systematic attack on the psychological sciences. Over-permissive courts of law with their condoning of delinquency, pseudo-enlightened penal reformers, 'victims of society', the psychologist and his patient all came under fierce attack. Discharging their self-hate and anxiety onto a convenient scapegoat, the new rulers, and the great majority electing them, outlawed all forms of psychic control, from the innocent market survey to lobotomy. The mentally ill were on their own, spared pity and consideration, made to pay to the hilt for their failings. The sacred cow of the community was the psychotic, free to wander where he wanted, drooling on doorsteps, sleeping on sidewalks, and woe betide anyone who tried to help him.

GREGORY had made that mistake. Escaping to Europe, first home of psychiatry, in the hope of finding a more tolerant climate, he set up a secret clinic in Paris with six other émigré analysts. For five years they worked undetected, until one of Gregory's patients, a tall ungainly girl with a psychogenic stutter, was revealed to be Muriel Bortman, daughter of the UW President-General. The analysis had failed tragically when the clinic was raided; after her death a lavish show trial (making endless play of electric shock apparatus, movies of insulin coma and the testimony of countless paranoids rounded up in the alleyways) had concluded in a three-year sentence.

Now at last he was out, his savings invested in the Jaguar, fleeing Europe and his memories of the prison for the empty highways of North Africa. He didn't want any more trouble.

"I'd like to help," he told the girl. "But the risks are too high. All your friend can do is try to come to terms with herself."

The girl chewed her lip fretfully. "I don't think she can. Thanks, anyway, doctor."

FOR three hours they sat back silently in the speeding car, until the lights of Tobruk came up ahead, the long curve of the harbor.

"It's 2 a.m.," Gregory said. "There's a motel here, I'll pick you up in the morning."

After they had gone to their rooms he sneaked back to the registry, booked himself into a new chalet. He fell asleep as Carole Sturgeon wandered forlornly up and down the verandas, whispering out his name.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AFTER breakfast he came back from the sea, found a big United World cruiser in the court, orderlies carrying a stretcher out to an ambulance.

A tall Libyan police colonel was leaning against the Jaguar, drumming his leather baton on the windscreen.

"Ah, Dr. Gregory. Good morning." He pointed his baton at the ambulance. "A profound tragedy, such a beautiful American girl."

Gregory rooted his feet in the grey sand, with an effort restrained himself from running over to the ambulance and pulling back the sheet. Fortunately the colonel's uniform and the thousands of morning and evening cell inspections kept him safely to attention.

"I'm Gregory, yes." The dust thickened in his throat. "Is she dead?"

The colonel stroked his neck with the baton. "Ear to ear. She must have found an old razor blade in the bathroom. About 3 o'clock this morning." He headed off towards Gregory's chalet, gesturing with the baton. Gregory followed him into the half light, stood tentatively by the bed.

"I was asleep then. The clerk will vouch for that."

"Naturally." The colonel gazed down at Gregory's possessions spread out across the bedcover, idly poked the black medical bag.

"She asked you for assistance, doctor? With her personal problems?"

"Not directly. She hinted at it, though. She sounded a little mixed up."

"Poor child." The colonel lowered his head sympathetically. "Her father is a first secretary at the Cairo Embassy, something of an autocrat. You Americans are very stern with your children, doctor. A firm hand, yes, but understanding costs nothing. Don't you agree? She was frightened of him, escaped from the American Hospital. My task is to provide an explanation for the authorities. If I had an idea of what was really worrying her . . . no doubt you helped her as best you could?"

Gregory shook his head. "I gave her no help at all, colonel. In fact, I refused to discuss her problems altogether." He smiled flatly at the colonel. "I wouldn't make the same mistake twice, would I?"

The colonel studied Gregory thoughtfully. "Sensible of you, doctor. But you surprise me. Surely the members of your profession regard themselves as a special calling, answerable to a higher authority. Are these ideals so easy to cast off?"

"I've had a lot of practice." Gregory began to pack away his things on the bed, bowed to the colonel as he saluted and made his way out into the court.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HALF an hour later he was on the Benghasi road, holding the Jaguar at 100, working off his tension and anger in savage bursts of speed. Free for only ten days, already he had got himself involved again, gone through all the agony of having to refuse help to someone desperately needing it, his hands itching to administer relief to the child but held back by the insane penalties. It wasn't only the lunatic legislation but the people enforcing it who ought to be swept away—Bortman and his fellow oligarchs.

He grimaced at the thought of the cold dead-faced Bortman, addressing the World Senate at Lake Success, arguing for increased penalties for the criminal psychopath. The man had stepped straight out of the 14th Century Inquisition, his bureaucratic puritanism masking two real obsessions: dirt and death. Any sane society would have locked Bortman up for ever, or given him a complete brain-lift. Indirectly Bortman was as responsible for the death of Carole Sturgeon as he would have been had he personally handed the razor blade to her.

AFTER Libya, Tunis. He blazed steadily along the coast road, the sea like a molten mirror on the right, avoiding the big towns where possible. Fortunately they weren't so bad as the European cities, psychotics loitering like stray dogs in the up-town parks, wise enough not to shop-lift or cause trouble, but a petty nuisance on the cafe terraces, knocking on hotel-room doors at all hours of the night.

At Algiers he spent three days at the Hilton, having a new engine fitted to the car, and hunted up Philip Kalundborg, an old Toronto colleague now working in a WHO children's hospital.

Over their third carafe of burgundy Gregory told him about Carole Sturgeon.

"It's absurd, but I feel guilty about her. Suicide is a highly suggestive act, I reminded her of Muriel Bortman's death. Damn it, Philip, I could have given her the sort of general advice any sensisible layman would have offered."

"Dangerous. Of course you were right," Philip assured him. "After the last three years who could argue otherwise?"

Gregory looked out across the terrace at the traffic whirling over the neon-lit cobbles. Beggars sat at their pitches along the sidewalk, whining for sous.

"Philip, you don't know what it's like in Europe now. At least 5% are probably in need of institutional care. Believe me, I'm frightened to go to America. In New York alone they're jumping from the roofs at the rate of ten a day. The world's turning into a madhouse, one half of society

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gloating righteously over the torments of the other. Most people don't realize which side of the bars they are. It's easier for you. Here the traditions are different."

Kalundborg nodded. "True. In the villages up-country it's been standard practice for centuries to blind schizophrenics and exhibit them in a cage. Injustice is so widespread that you build up an indiscriminate tolerance to every form."

A TALL dark-bearded youth in faded cotton slacks and rope sandals stepped across the terrace and put his hands on their table. His eyes were sunk deep below his forehead, around his lips the brown staining of narcotic poisoning.

"Christian!" Kalundborg snapped angrily. He shrugged hopelessly at Gregory, then turned to the young man with quiet exasperation. "My dear fellow, this has gone on for too long. I can't help you, there's no point in asking."

The young man nodded patiently. "It's Marie," he explained in a slow roughened voice. "I can't control her. I'm frightened what she may do to the baby. Postnatal withdrawal, you know—"

"Nonsense! I'm not an idiot, Christian. The baby is nearly three. If Marie is a nervous wreck you've made her so. Believe me, I wouldn't help you if I was allowed to. You must cure yourself or you are finished. Already you have chronic barbiturism. Dr. Gregory here will agree with me."

Gregory nodded. The young man stared blackly at Kalundborg, glanced at Gregory and then shambled off through the tables.

Kalundborg filled his glass. "They have it all wrong today. They think our job was to further addiction, not cure it. In their pantheon the father-figure is always benevolent."

"That's invariably been Bortman's line. Psychiatry is ultimately self-indulgent, an encouragement to weakness and lack of will. Admittedly there's no one more single-minded than an obsessional neurotic. Bortman himself is a good example."

AS he entered the tenth-floor bedroom the young man was going through his valise on the bed. For a moment Gregory wondered whether he was a UW spy, perhaps the meeting on the terrace had been an elaborate trap.

"Find what you want?"

Christian finished whipping through the bag, then tossed it irritably onto the floor. He edged restlessly away from Gregory around the bed, his eyes hungrily searching the wardrobe top and lamp brackets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Kalundborg was right," Gregory told him quietly. "You're wasting your time."

"The hell with Kalundborg," Christian snarled softly. "He's working the wrong levels. Do you think I'm looking for a jazz heaven, doctor? With a wife and child? I'm not that irresponsible. I took a Master's degree in law at Heidelberg." He wandered off around the room, then stopped to survey Gregory closely.

Gregory began to slide in the drawers. "Well, get back to your jurisprudence. There are enough ills to weigh in this world."

"Doctor, I've made a start. Didn't Kalundborg tell you I sued Bortman for murder?" When Gregory seemed puzzled he explained: "A private civil action, not criminal proceedings. My father killed himself five years ago after Bortman had him thrown out of the Bar Association."

Gregory picked his valise off the floor. "I'm sorry," he said non-committally. "What happened to your suit against Bortman?"

Christian stared out through the window into the dark air. "It was never entered. Some World Bureau investigators saw me after I started to be a nuisance and suggested I leave the States for ever. So I came to Europe to get my degree. I'm on my way back now. I need the barbiturates to stop myself trying to toss a bomb at Bortman."

Suddenly he propelled himself across the room, before Gregory could stop him was out on the balcony, jack-knifed over the edge. Gregory dived after him, kicked away his feet and tried to pull him off the ledge. Christian clung to it, shouting into the darkness, the lights from the cars racing in the damp street below. On the sidewalk people looked up.

CHRISTIAN was doubled up with laughter as they fell back into the room, slumped down on the bed, pointing his finger at Gregory, who was leaning against the wardrobe, gasping in exhausted spasms.

"Big mistake there, doctor. You better get out fast before I tip off the Police Prefect. Stopping a suicide! God, with your record you'd get ten years for that. What a joke!"

Gregory shook him by the shoulders, temper flaring. "Listen, what are you playing at? What do you want?"

Christian pushed Gregory's hands away and lay back weakly. "Help me, doctor. I want to kill Bortman, it's all I think about. If I'm not careful I'll really try. Show me how to forget him." His voice rose desperately. "Damn, I *hated* my father, I was glad when Bortman threw him out."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gregory eyed him thoughtfully, then went over to the window and bolted out the night.

TWO months later, at the motel outside Casablanca, Gregory finally burned the last of the analysis notes. Christian, clean-shaven and wearing a neat white tropical suit, a neutral tie, watched from the door as the stack of coded entries gutted out in the ashtray, then carried them into the bathroom and flushed them away.

When Christian had loaded his suitcases into the car Gregory said: "One thing before we go. A complete analysis can't be effected in two months, let alone two years. It's something you work at all your life. If you have a relapse, come to me, even if I'm in Tahiti, or Shanghai or Archangel." Gregory paused. "If they ever find out, you know what will happen?" When Christian nodded quietly he sat down in the chair by the writing table, gazing out through the date palms at the huge domed mouth of the transatlantic tunnel a mile away. For a long time he knew he would be unable to relax. In a curious way he felt that the three years at Marseilles had been wasted, that he was starting a suspended sentence of indefinite length. There had been no satisfaction at the successful treatment, perhaps because he had given in to Christian partly for fear of being incriminated in an attack on Bortman.

"With luck, you should be able to live with yourself now. Try to remember that whatever evils Bortman may perpetrate in the future he's really irrelevant to *your* problem. It was the stroke your mother suffered after your father's death that made you realize the guilt you felt subconsciously for hating him, but you conveniently shifted the blame onto Bortman, and by eliminating him you thought you could free yourself. The temptation may occur again."

Christian nodded, standing motionlessly by the doorway. His face had filled out, his eyes were a placid grey. He looked like any well-groomed UW bureaucrat.

GREGORY picked up a newspaper. "I see Bortman is attacking the American Bar Association as a subversive body, probably planning to have it proscribed. If it succeeds it'll be an irreparable blow to civil liberty." He looked up thoughtfully at Christian, who showed no reaction. "Right, let's go. Are you still fixed on getting back to the States?"

"Of course." Christian climbed into the car, then shook Gregory's hand. Gregory had decided to stay in Africa, find a hospital where he could work, and had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

given Christian the car. "Marie will wait for me in Algiers until I finish my business."

"What's that?"

Christian pressed the starter, sent a roar of dust and exhaust across the compound.

"I'm going to kill Bortman," he said quietly.

Gregory gripped the windscreen. "You're not serious."

"You cured me, doctor, and give or take the usual margins I'm completely sane, more than I probably ever will be again. Damn few people in this world are now, so that makes the obligation on me to act rationally even greater. Well, every ounce of logic tells me that someone's got to make the effort to get rid of the grim menagerie running things now, and Bortman looks like a pretty good start. I intend to drive up to Lake Success and take a shot at him." He shunted the gear change into second, and added, "Don't try to have me stopped, doctor, because they'll only dig out our long weekend here."

As he started to take his foot off the clutch Gregory shouted: "Christian! You'll never get away with it! They'll catch you anyway!" but the car wrenched forward out of his hand.

Gregory ran through the dust after it, stumbling over half-buried stones, realizing helplessly that when they caught Christian and probed down into the past few months they would soon find the real assassin, an exiled doctor with a three-year grudge.

"Christian!" he yelled, choking on the white ash. "Christian, you're insane!" THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DIVVY UP

By MILT LESSER

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

Here's a fine, hard story of the inverted ethical system of the post-war world, where inhumanity is the norm and cruelty pays dividends.

HARDESTY fondled the sight picture with his right eye, squinting shut his left eye, caressing the trigger of his rifle with the index finger of his right hand and waiting for the squad leader to issue his commands.

"Ready," called the squad leader.

At times like this, Hardesty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

observed, time seemed suspended. He wondered if it worked that way for the condemned man, too. The sun was just coming up over the rim of the bomb crater, splashing the rubble there with rose and gold. A hungry dog howled somewhere north of the crater.

"Aim . . ."

A dozen rifles were pointed at various parts of the condemned man's anatomy. Hardesty always selected the stomach, although there invariably was a softie in each firing squad to spoil the fun. The hungry dog began to yelp. Someone had probably left ground glass for it.

Before the squad leader could shout the command to fire, a rifle shot cracked flatly, with a complete lack of resonance, across the bomb crater. The condemned man jerked upward, then strained forward in death against the fetters which bound him to the firing post.

"Damn it!" swore the squad leader. "Who the hell did that?"

Jumping the gun had started some years ago strictly as a sport. Now it was business, though, and profitable if you could get away with it and trust your confederate.

"Who did that?" screamed the squad leader.

No one spoke. The dozen members of the firing squad stood rigidly at the aim position, their weapons pointing like accusing fingers at the dead man slumping forward against the firing post. Two crows flapped by like black paper overhead, cawing raucously.

"All right," snapped the squad leader. "Uh-ten-*shun!*"

Rifle stocks were slapped in brisk unison as the weapons were brought down from the aim position through port to order arms. A trickle of sweat rolled across the bridge of Hardesty's nose. A bus rumbled by two blocks east, on what was left of Lexington Avenue. Hardesty wondered if the driver's union sanctioned passenger trapping. He had once traveled ten extra blocks on a bus which had slowed down without stopping at the designated spots. He had watched braver passengers than himself leap from the vehicle, risking broken bones. Well, they probably had time-clocks to punch; Hardesty was in business for himself.

"In-spec-shun — *harms!*" the squad leader screamed. Twelve rifles snapped up to port, twelve bolts were slammed back. The squad leader walked down the line, examining rifle chambers. Three rifles to Hardesty's left, he stopped. "Here she is," he said.

From the corner of his eye, Hardesty saw the girl, calm as murder, hurl her heavy rifle at the squad leader. The stock slammed across his face and knocked him down before he could parry it with his arms. The girl turned and fled up over the rim of the bomb crater.

"Catch her!" bellowed the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squad leader, who stood up, wiped the blood from his lips and sprinted toward the crater rim. Ten members of the squad followed him on the double. The penalty for jumping the gun was severe; the reward for catching the culprit, considerable.

Hardesty did not follow the squad leader.

He waited until the last of the squad had scrambled up the steep slope of the crater wall, waited until the drumming sound of feet on the buckled pavement faded, then approached the dead man still suspended from the firing post. The man's face looked peaceful, as if he were only sleeping. He wore a mackinaw, a pair of patched trousers and heavy rubble-boots. Hardesty could not see where the bullet had gone in.

Approaching the corpse, Hardesty wondered if the girl who had fired prematurely would make good her escape. Lord knew there were places to hide in the bombed-out city. Hardesty began to hope they would capture her, though. It would simplify things. He did not know her name, but fifteen minutes before the execution he had tossed a coin with her. Hardesty had won. She would kill the condemned man prematurely, Hardesty would remain behind to go through his pockets for booty. Later on, they would meet at the stump of the Lever Brothers Building and divvy up. Provided she wasn't caught. Provided Hardesty remembered.

Sucker, he thought.

He reached the dead man and started through the big flap pockets of his mackinaw. A cold wind swirled into the crater, lifting a cloud of choking dust. The first red glow of the sun had faded, leaving a pale and watery orb to fight the gathering clouds in the eastern sky. It looked like snow was on the way. Hardesty found a tattered wallet in the left rear pocket of the man's trousers.

"Hold it," a woman's voice called softly.

Startled, Hardesty looked around. He saw no one. He might hurl himself behind the corpse and the firing post, his rifle ready—but the woman could have been crouched behind the embankment there.

"What do you want?" Hardesty demanded in an arrogant voice. You were a goner if you showed fear. That's what they wanted, fear.

"I'm armed. I have you covered. I can see you but you can't see me. Drop your rifle."

Bluff? Hardesty wondered.

"I'll count three."

And fire on two, you shrew, Hardesty thought. He wondered again about the other girl, the one who was fleeing across the city now. A confederate of hers? It was possible. Double-dealing invited triple dealing. Hardesty thumbed the safety catch forward on his rifle and dropped the weapon at his feet. He still held the dead man's wallet in his left hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The woman appeared over the rear embankment of the crater. She wore a cap with earlaps, a tattered leather lumber-jacket a heavy black skirt, rubble-boots and no gloves. She carried a sawed-off shotgun in the cradle of her bent left arm. She was pretty, but did not look mean enough to be really beautiful. Her eyes were piercing.

"What have you got in your hand?" she said.

"His wallet."

"Give it to me." The young woman came forward, kicked Hardesty's rifle out of reach with her left foot and held out her right hand.

Just then an air-raid siren began to wail. Hardesty looked up at the pale cold sky. He saw no jets. He heard none. The spotters didn't give you much warning these days. *They* knew of the raid in advance, of course. *They* had received word from the spotters up and down the coast. While they would be executed if they failed to report the raid entirely, there was no stipulation on the time limit and no way of proving it if there had been. As a consequence, the spotters were rich men. You hardly had time to lock up or hide your valuables with only seconds to reach shelter.

"Think it's for real?" the woman asked Hardesty.

He shrugged. He still heard no jets. False alarms kept you on your toes and made you wait until the last possible moment when the real thing came. False alarms? The spotters called them air-raid drills.

"I doubt it," Hardesty said truthfully. The bomb crater would make a fairly good shelter, anyway. The worst of the shock waves would pass over it. Hardesty hoped shelter-seeking pedestrians wouldn't find the bomb crater. He might be able to deal with the woman alone, but he'd lose whatever booty was left in the dead man's pockets if a few dozen scavengers came down into the hole.

"Give me the wallet."

Hardesty handed it over. "Who are you?" he said. "A friend of that blonde girl who—"

"Did you take anything else? I'm the widow."

A head was silhouetted briefly against the pale sky above the rim of the crater. The widow fired a warning shot from one barrel of her shotgun, then quickly reloaded it. The head vanished.

"You have no right to your husband's belongings," Hardesty said. "You ought to know that."

"You have a right?"

"Sure. Why don't I?"

"Because I saw what happened. You were in cahoots with that blonde girl, weren't you?" The widow went through her dead husband's pockets as she talked, stuffing what she found into the pockets of her mackinaw. Hardesty stared hungrily at the silver gleam of coins, the dull green of paper money.

"Lady," Hardesty said derisively, "you're a sucker. Your

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION 80¢

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

husband was holding out on you."

"What else did you find?"

"I didn't say I found anything."

"But you implied it."

"Go scratch," said Hardesty in a taunting voice. He wanted the woman to search him. He thought he could take her if she got busy with his pockets.

"I could kill you and search you afterwards."

"You could, if I didn't hide it where you'd never find it."

"Hide what?" the woman licked her lips eagerly. She looked real pretty now. Hardesty had always preferred the mean, hard look to the unctuous one which stamped so many faces these days. The woman took a step toward Hardesty, who tensed himself. It was the little things like this which made life worth living. The cat and mouse game. Personal politics, it was called. It used to be called ethics. The woman put her hand in the pocket of Hardesty's coat, anxiously searching.

At that moment, the first wave of jets came over.

The sky shook itself, disgorging bombs. A bright flash blossomed beyond the western rim of the crater, and another. Seconds later, Hardesty heard the explosions. The woman had forgotten Hardesty and crouched in terror at the feet of her dead husband, who still stood there leaning forward from the firing post. Had the woman denounced him for some personal reason? wondered Hardesty. It happened all the time. Personal politics.

The second wave of jets came over, their roar all but drowning out the stacatto pop-pop-pop of the AA guns. The country had used up its entire supply of ground-to-bomber missiles. The enemy had depleted its store of fusion and fission bombs. Everyone settled for ack-ack and TNT.

The bombs rained down, exploding like firecrackers on a scale model of the ruined city. It always looked that way to Hardesty. Unreal. He supposed it was like that, unreal, to everyone until the one bomb which was too close and suddenly too real compressed the air before its warhead and shrieked earthward, growing and growing and not cutting off the shriek before the sound of the explosion like kids do when they play war and make vocal bomb sounds but terminating the shriek instantly with the explosion and killing you almost before you heard the sound with concussion or flying masonry or fire.

Like that bomb, right now, right there, which picked up a two-story building, uprooting it at the foundation and lifting it slowly into the air in defiance of gravity, then turning it over gently, teaching it tricks before it perished, flipping it carelessly, indifferently, showering a slow downpour of furniture to the ground through the now floorless bottom story and then turning the whole building once more,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like a child's block caught in a gale, and suddenly sundering it, breaking the building into large pieces which floated lazily downward, exploding with a paradoxical lack of violence into smaller pieces, and the smaller ones into still smaller, until the whole thing came down, dust and shards now, like a multi-colored snowstorm, beyond the rim of the bomb crater.

Afterwards came the concussion, mitigated by the depth of the crater but still strong, flipping Hardesty across the crater floor. He let his muscles go slack, instinctively knowing there would be less likelihood of a broken bone that way. He tasted blood in his mouth and felt his head burrow into rubble and ashes. He stood up groggily as the all-clear sounded. You had to be cautious. Sometimes the spotters tricked you. Then you went out into the open and the bombs came down again almost as if the spotters and the enemy bombardiers were in secret entente with one another and would later meet in some undreamed of neutral place and share the booty collected from corpses and parts of corpses. It was a dog eat dog world.

The concussion had ripped loose the firing post, which had fallen with the dead man still dangling, like a drunk leaning backwards against a lamp-post, across the woman. She lay there under its weight, her legs drumming, her arms twitching.

"Help me," she called to Hardesty in a feeble voice. "Please help me." She was very ugly that way, with a look of supplication on her dirt-smeared face. Hardesty walked over to her and placed his foot on her shoulder so she wouldn't twitch so, then went through her pockets quickly. He found two five million dollar bills and a handful of small denomination coins, one and two hundred thousand dollars each, mostly. Shrugging his disappointment, Hardesty realized it would be only enough to keep him going a week, and that long only if he spent it frugally. Those were the breaks.

"What else did you find?" the woman croaked through bloody lips.

She would probably live, Hardesty figured. She was only pinned there; she didn't seem badly hurt. Naturally, he changed his residence in the bombed-out city every day, but if the blonde girl were caught and described him to save her own neck and if this woman confirmed the description to receive her share of the ten million dollars in denouncer's bounty, Hardesty might possibly be found. The penalty for jumping the gun or aiding gun-jumping was death. Other citizens didn't have their just opportunity to scavenge.

"What else?" the woman asked again.

Hardesty went over and found the sawed-off shotgun. "Nothing," he said, and split the woman's skull open with the stock of the shotgun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hey, man! Hey, over this way!"

A digging crew was working with picks and shovels on a ruined building on 44th Street. It had been an office building of some dozen storys, but the whole façade had collapsed. The offices thus revealed looked like tiny cubicles with cardboard ceilings, floors and walls. The whole ruined structure looked like a giant compartmented eggbox lying on its side, the small square compartments cluttered with impossibly small office furniture carved to perfect scale.

"Hey, man! We got an extra shovel."

Community effort. You had to dig out the ruins. In the early days of the war you looked for living people, but now personal politics had changed that. The diggers had clubs and knives ready in case any survivors were found to contest their booty. They were hacking away at the heaps of broken concrete with consummate effort, stopping every now and then for hot drinks which the Red Cross brought around. They had some union, those Red Cross workers. They were guaranteed ten percent of the booty in any building they serviced during digging. Often only the digging foreman got coffee, but it didn't matter.

The scene reminded Hardesty of a clever children's toy he had seen once. It was a hollow globe of plastic, with water inside. When you turned it upside down, tiny jet bombers dropped tinier bombs on a skyscraper which resembled the Lever Brothers Building. The building flew apart, spitting miniature corpses and furniture out of windows. Minute diggers started to dig at the base of the structure and a Red Cross vehicle spilled out tiny, spider-like Red Cross workers with armbands. When you turned the globe right-side-up again, everything assumed its place like before the air-raid. It was very ingenious.

Hardesty thought it would be a good idea to get out of his neighborhood. There was no telling what had happened to the blonde. If he were caught in her position, he certainly would have squealed. Anyway, Hardesty had heard that the pickings were good down by the old Navy Yard in Brooklyn, provided you could steal a boat and make your way across the East River under the ruined bridges. Some people claimed the waters of the river were stil radioactive, but Hardesty suspected the radiation had long since flowed out to sea. It was probably a rumor promulgated and maintained by the roving bands of Brooklyn scavengers. Hardesty had always preferred being a small businessman. He just couldn't see scavenging for a salary, despite the comparative security it offered.

"Well, what do you say, man?"

"No, really, I have to be getting along."

"All right, then. It's an order." Someone thrust a shovel at Hardesty. He glanced at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man's sleeve and saw the starred armband of a block captain. Damn these civil servants! You hated their guts but had to obey them. Oh, they were psychopathic enough. Hardesty admitted that to himself. You couldn't get any kind of a decent job with the city unless the Civil Service Board passed on your psychopathy. But they were too smug in an orderly, regimented way. They could quote ordinances to you until you wanted to wring their necks but they were right and if you did, you were as good as dead.

Hardesty took the shovel in his numb cold hands and began to dig mechanically where the pick-ax crew had already done its work. After an hour, he had uncovered nothing worthwhile. A teen-aged Red Cross girl brought him a cup of evil-smelling synthetic coffee, but he drank it to warm his stiff muscles.

All at once, he heard a tapping sound coming from a big bronze pipe which had probably carried water or refuse from one of the offices upstairs.

"Someone's alive in there," a youngster next to Hardesty said. He ran over with a pick-ax and began to hack furiously at the rubble.

The block captain rushed to the spot and said, "Are you crazy or something? There's no air in there. Give them a couple of hours and they'll be dead. Are you forgetting your ordinances, boy?"

"But we can save them!" the youngster said in some confusion.

"We got too many mouths to feed as it is. Anyhow, you want them contesting the booty. If they survive, they're liable to claim it all."

"I—I'm sorry." The youngster stopped hacking away with his pick-ax. He seemed genuinely contrite, but you never knew about that type. He might come back tonight and dig in private. By then, fortunately, it would be too late. But the city hospitals were full of just such people who couldn't adjust to the rigors of war. Hardesty had heard about a proposed bill which would have them all killed painlessly. That was no way to die, without pain, but it served them right. Of course, thought Hardesty bitterly, the city would claim all their booty—which was another matter entirely.

Five minutes later, Hardesty found a dismembered arm. It was already frozen with the cold and seemed more like wax than flesh. The arm was too muscular to have belonged to a woman. The man had worn a ring and a gold-plated wristwatch which, between them, might bring eighty or ninety million dollars on the black market. Hardesty got the watch loose and was working the ring off the frozen fingers when the block captain spotted him.

"I saw that," he said. He had a big beefy face with eyes so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

close together they seemed to be forever staring at the tip of his nose. "You think you're in business for yourself?"

"I'm sorry," Hardesty said lamely. "Habit. I'm a scavenger by occupation. Here. Here's the ring."

The beefy-faced man scrutinized the ring and pocketed it. "The wristwatch," he said.

"There must be some mistake."

"I saw you put it in your pocket."

"No, you must have been imagining things." What would it bring on the black market? Fifty million dollars in a quick sale? Decent living for a month. Hardesty was damned if the block captain would get it.

"Fork it over, wise guy."

The other diggers had stopped their work to watch Hardesty's growing—and now perilous—discomfort. "Let's just get on with the work," Hardesty suggested. He had placed the sawed-off shotgun down near the curb when he started digging. He saw it there now, with one of the Red Cross teen-agers staring at it covetously. He wondered if he could reach it in time and blast the beefy block captain's face in. He decided the shovel would be quicker and every bit as effective.

"For the last time . . ." began the block captain.

Swinging the shovel like a baseball bat, Hardesty bounced it off his jaw. He didn't wait to see the results. He bolted for the curb, scooped up his sawed-off shotgun, and ran.

It was snowing now, big dry flakes which fell from a windless sky, slow patient flakes which would fall for many hours if the leaden sky was any indication, choking the broken arteries of the perishing city.

Let it, thought Hardesty. I don't have to go to Brooklyn, after all. I know where I can dispose of this wristwatch.

He was jogging along in no great hurry. He had darted down Vanderbilt Avenue by the ruins of Grand Central Station, then cut back and forth through the streets in the low forties. They had chased him for a while but had given him up by now, he supposed. Hell, it was only one wristwatch. He slowed to a walk along Park Avenvue and watched the city die.

The city had been moribund ever since Hardesty could remember. It seemed the natural state of things, just as the public politicians had finally given in to the inevitable and now decried that war was the natural state of human society. With war, cities died. With dead cities, war became a more personal thing. That was where personal politics came in. War became an individual thing as well as a social enterprise. That was the way you lived.

An old woman came trudging along in the snow, her boot-shod feet making footprints clear down through the thin white

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

covering to the broken gray sidewalk beneath it. She was selling poor-grade booty, trinkets and a few items of faded old clothing. "Anything I've got," she hawked, holding a yellow straw basket up for Hardesty's inspection, "anything in the basket for only a hundred thousand dollars."

When Hardesty shook his head, she tagged along, gripping his sleeve in clawlike fingers and tugging at it. "Go away, grandma," he said. The old lady went on ranting about her wares in a high, incongruously childish voice. Maybe a few of the diggers were still looking for him, Hardesty thought. The crone's piercing voice would attract people for blocks.

The hag cleared her throat and spat yellow phlegm in the clean white snow. "See this dress? See, it's second hand, but you could hardly tell. For you, a special price because you have a cruel face. For you—"

"Damn it!" said Hardesty, and fished in his pocket for a few coins. There was no one else on the street, no one else on the lonely landscape of battered buildings and stumps of buildings. A few feet to Hardesty's left, a fire hydrant had ruptured; a torrent of water gushed from it, freezing at the edges of the large puddle which had formed, as if the ice had started there and would approach the hydrant and strangle it. Hardesty was surprised that the city still pumped so much pressure through its water mains.

"Here," Hardesty said, handing the old woman a few coins and taking her basket. It was unexpectedly heavy. The old woman thanked him profusely in her childish voice. Hardesty had no use for the contents of the basket, but wouldn't return it to the hag. Later he could dispose of it. Returning it to her would be charity, and you just did not indulge in charity.

The old woman walked off through the snow, cackling happily.

"There he is!" someone cried.

Hardesty heard the footfalls pounding behind him. The diggers. He began to run, hurling the basket away from him. He turned around to look and saw four or five shapes sprinting after him. Hardesty raised the shotgun without bothering to aim and fired both barrels. The hag clutched her throat and pitched forward in the snow. One of the men fell with her. Hardesty tossed the now useless shotgun aside and heard something clatter against the wall next to him. Sparks flew. It was a knife. The man's aim had been good, almost too good.

Hardesty circled the block twice, then hid in a doorway. It was a doorway to absolutely nowhere. On one side was the street, on the other was a rubble-filled bomb crater. This had once been a building, but only the doorway stood. Even the door had been blown to bits.

A sign over the door said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WAL — RIA. Hardesty thought a hotel had stood here, long ago. He crouched in the doorway and waited, catching his breath. It was so cold, his teeth began to chatter uncontrollably. His lungs, though, were on fire, and his nostrils. He couldn't stay there too long. He would freeze to death. Perhaps they had taken a wrong turn over on Madison Avenue.

Hardesty walked boldly out into the street. No one stopped him.

Ten minutes later, after hiding in a pile of rubble when he saw someone coming down the street, Hardesty found himself passing the stump of the Lever Brothers Building. The girl, he thought suddenly. He had forgotten about the blonde. He shouldn't be passing here. She might be waiting for him.

"Psst! Hey, it's me. I didn't know to expect you or what."

It was the blonde's voice. Hardesty had in mind to run again, but there would be too many people after him, too many people who, out of spite or patriotism, would identify him and denounce him. He would share the executed man's booty with the blonde girl. But not the wristwatch. She had nothing to do with the wristwatch. Maybe, he thought, she even knew of a good warm place to sleep.

"I had a little delay," Hardesty said. He didn't see the blonde anywhere. She was inside the building.

"Well, come on in."

People came from all over Manhattan to see the Lever Brothers stump. Miraculously, some of the green-tinted glass was still whole. No one could explain this except to say it was a freak of concussion, and it *had* happened, hadn't it? The few panes which remained were almost the only unbroken panes of glass in New York City.

It was green in there, and dim. Looking out through the glass, the snow resembled tons of chopped spinach coming down. The blonde's hair was green. Her skin was green, and her eyes. She had a hard cold look on her face now.

"Well?" she said.

Hardesty began to empty his pockets for the divvy up.

Someone said, "Stop right there! Hold it."

The man was big and had probably used many times with success the gun he carried in his fist. It was the man who had spoken. He covered Hardesty with the gun while the blonde hastily went through the booty they had found.

"You're being held under city ordinance 217," the big man told Hardesty. Ordinance 217 was concerned with gun-jumping or aiding a gun-jumper. The penalty was death.

Not long afterwards, Hardesty was bound to a firing post near the embankment of a crater close to the Lever Brothers stump, but far enough away so none of the glass would be shat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tered. The firing squad lined up. The blonde girl was third from the right. Hardesty hoped someone would aim for his stomach and the others would miss. If he had to die, he wanted to die painfully.

"Ready!" barked the squad leader. Hardesty wasn't sure, but thought he was the same man who had led that other squad.

"Aim . . ."

Time was suspended again. Even more for the condemned.

And then, before the squad leader could shout "fire!" Hardesty heard a gunshot. He didn't feel the bullet go in, but as he slumped forward away from the firing post he felt a warm wetness, and no other sensation, in his chest. With a final effort of will he looked up and saw the blonde girl's face. There was a faint smile tugging at the corners of her lips. All at once Hardesty knew. She had probably taken someone in this squad aside, as she had taken Hardesty aside. She had made a deal with him. Meet at the Lever Brothers stump, or someplace else? Divvy up. It was the surest way to catch gun-jumpers. The blonde girl was working for the government and probably collected a healthy slice of the booty.

The last thing Hardesty ever heard was the squad leader's angry voice as the man roared: "Who the hell jumped the gun?"

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

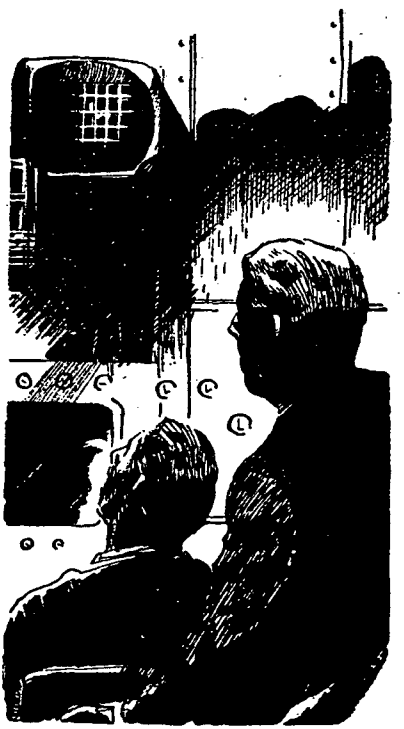
WHAT NEED of MAN?

By HAROLD CALIN

Illustrated by SUMMERS

Bannister was a rocket scientist. He started with the premise of testing man's reaction to space probes under actual conditions; but now he was just testing space probes—and man was a necessary evil to contend with.

WHEN you are out in a clear night in summer, the sky looks very warm and friendly. The moon is a big pleasant place where it may not be so humid as where you are, and it is lighter than anything you've ever seen. That's the way it is in summer. You never think about space being "out there". It's all one big wonderful thing, and you can never really fall off, or have anything bad happen to you. There is just that much more to see. You lie on the grass and look at the sky long enough and you fall into sort of a detached mood. It's suddenly as if you're looking down at the sky and you're lying on a ceiling by some reverse process of gravitation, and everything is absolutely pleasant.



In winter it's quite another thing, of course. That's because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sky never looks warm. In winter, if you are in a cold climate, the sky doesn't appear at all friendly. It's beautiful, mind you, but never friendly. That is when you see it as it really is. Summer has a way of making it look friendly. The way you see it on a winter night is only the merest idea of what it is really like. That's why I can't feel too bad about the monkey. You see, it might have been a man, maybe me. I've been out there, too.

There are two types of classified government information. One is the type that is really classified because it is concerned with efforts and events that are of true importance and go beyond public evaluation. Occasional unauthorized reports on this type of information, within the scope that I knew it at least, are written off as unidentified flying objects or such. The second type of classified information is the kind that somehow always gets into the newspapers all over the world . . . like the X-15, and Project Dyna-Soar . . . and Project Argus.

Project Argus had as its basis theory that was proven completely unsound six years ago. It was proven unsound by Dennis Lynds. He got killed doing it. It had to do with return vehicles from capsules traveling as escape velocity, being oriented and controlled completely by telemetering devices. It didn't work. This time, the monkey was used for newspaper consumption. I'm sure Bannister would have preferred it if the monkey had been killed on contact. It would have been simpler that way. No mass hysteria about torturing a poor, ignorant beast. A simple scientific sacrifice, already dead upon announcement, would have been a *fait accompli*, so to speak, and nothing could overshadow the success of Project Argus.

But Project Argus was a failure. Maybe someday you'll understand why.

Because of the monkey? Possibly. You see, I flew the second shot after Lynds got killed. After that, came the hearing, and after that no men flew in Bannister's ships anymore. They proved Lynds nuts, and got rid of me, but nobody would try it, even with manual controls, where there is no atmosphere.

When you're putting down after a maximum velocity flight, you feed a set of landing coordinates into the computer, and you wait for the computer to punch out a landing configuration and the controls set themselves and lock into pattern. Then you just sit there. I haven't yet met a pilot who didn't begin to sweat at that moment, and sweat all the way down. We

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weren't geared for that kind of flying. We still aren't, for that matter. We had always done it ourselves, (even on instruments, we interepreted their meaning to the controls ourselves) and we didn't like it. We had good reason. The telemetry circuits were no good. That's a bad part of a truly classified operation: they don't have to be too careful, there aren't any voters to offend. About the circuits, sometimes they worked, sometimes not. That was the way it went. They wouldn't put manual controls in for us.

It wasn't that they regarded man with too little faith, and electronic equipment with too much. They just didn't regard man at all. They looked upon scientific reason and technology as completely infallible. Nothing is infallible. Not their controls, not their vehicles, and not their blasted egos.

Lynds was assigned the first flight at escape velocity. They could not be dissuaded from the belief that at ultimate speed, a pilot operating manual controls was completely ineffectual. Like kids that have to run electric trains all by themselves, playing God with a transformer. That was when I asked them why bother with a pilot altogether. They talked about the whole point being a test of man's ability to survive; they'd deal with control in proper order. They didn't believe it, and neither did we. We all got very peculiar feelings about the whole business after that. The position on controls was made pretty final by Bannister.

"There will be no manuals in my ships," he said. "It would negate the primary purpose of this project. We must ascertain the successful completion of escape and return by completely automatic operation."

"How about emergency controls?" I asked. "With a switch-off from automatic if they should fail."

"They will not fail. Any manual controls would be inoperative by the pilot in any case. No more questions."

I feel the way I do about the monkey, Argus, because, in a way, we all quit about that time. You don't like having spent your life in a rather devoted way with purposes and all that, and then being placed in the hands of a collection of technologists like just so many white mice . . . or monkeys, if you will. Lynds, of course, had little choice. The project was cleared and the assignment set. He hated it well enough, I know, but it was his place to perform the only way one does.

It ended the way we knew it would. I heard it all. It wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gruesome, as you might imagine. I spoke with Lynds the whole time. It was sort of a resigned horror. The initial countdown went off without a hitch and the hissing of the escape valves on the carrier rocket changed to a sound that hammered the sky apart as it lifted off the pad.

"Well, she's off," somebody said.

"Let's don't count chickens," Bannister said tautly. Wellington G. Bannister worked for the Germans on V-2s. He is the chief executive of technology in the section to which we were assigned at that time. He is the world's leading expert on exotic fuel rocket projectile systems, rocket design, and a brilliant electronic engineer as well. High enough subordinates call him Wellie. Pilots always called him Professor Bannister. I issued the report that was read in closed session in London in which I accused Bannister of murdering Lynds. That's how come I'm here now. I was cashiered out, just short of a general court martial. That's one of the nice parts about truly classified work. They can't make you out an idiot in public. Living on a boat in the Mediterranean is far nicer than looking up at the earth through a porthole in a smashed up ship on the moon, you must admit.

Well, Bannister could have well counted chickens on that launching. The first, second and third stages fired off perfectly, and within fourteen minutes the capsule detached into orbit just under escape velocity. The orbit was enormously far out. They let Lynds complete a single orbit, then fired the capsule's rockets. He ran off tangential to orbit at escape velocity on a pattern that would probably run in a straight path to infinity. In fact, the capsule is probably still on its way, and as I said, it's six years now. After four minutes, the return vehicle was activated and as it broke away from the capsule, Lynds blacked out for twenty seconds. That was the only time I was out of direct contact with him after he went into orbit.

"Now do you understand about the manual controls?" Bannister said.

"He'll come out of it in less than a minute."

"One can never be sure."

"There's still no reason why you can't use duplicate control systems."

"With a switch-off on the automatic, if they fail?"

"Yes. If for nothing more than to give a man a chance to save his own neck."

"They won't fail."

"The simplest things fail, Bannister. Campbell was killed in a far less elaborate way."

He looked at me. "Campbell?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Oh, yes. The landing over the reef. I had nothing to do with that."

"You designed the power shut-off that failed."

"Improper servicing. A simple mechanical failure."

"Or the inability of a mechanism to compensate. The wind shifted after computer coordination. A pilot can feel it. Your instruments can't. There was no failure, there. The shut-off worked perfectly and Campbell was killed because of it."

I watched the tracking screen, listened to the high keening noises coming from the receivers. The computers clicked rapidly, feeding out triangulated data on the positions of the escape vehicle and the capsule. The capsule had been diverted from its path slightly by reaction to the vehicle's ejection. Its speed, however, was increasing as it moved farther out. The vehicle with Lynds was in a path parabolic to the capsule, almost like the start of an orbit, but at a fantastic distance. He was, of course, traveling at escape velocity or better, and you do not orbit at escape velocity.

"Harry. Harry, how long was I out?" We heard Lynds' voice come alive suddenly through the crackling static.

"Hello, Dennis. Listen to me. How are you?"

"I'm fine, Harry. What's wrong? How long was I out?"

"Nothing is wrong. You were out less than half a minute. The ejection gear worked perfectly."

"That's good." The tension left his voice and he settled back to a checking and rechecking of instruments, reactions and what he would see. They activated the scanner. The transmitting equipment brought us a view that was little more than a spotty blackness. But I think the equipment was not working properly. You see, what Lynds said did not quite match what we saw. They later used the recording of his voice together with an affidavit sworn to by a technician that our receiver was operating perfectly, as evidence in my hearing. They proved, in their own way, that Lynds had suffered continual delirium after blacking out. The speed, they said, was the cause. It became known as Danger V. Nobody ever bothered to explain why I never encountered the phenomenon of Danger V. It became official record, and my experience was the deviant. It was Bannister's alibi.

We watched the spotty blackness on the screen and listened to Lynds.

"Harry, I can see it all pretty well now," he began. "There's slight spin on this bomb so it comes and goes. About sixty second revolutions. Nice and slow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Terribly nauseating to look at. But I'm feeling fine now, better than fine. Give me a stick and I'll move the Earth. Who was it said that? Clever fellow. You say I was out about half a minute. That makes it about three more minutes until Bannister's controls are supposed to bring me back."

"Yes, Dennis, but what do you see? Do you hear me? What do you see?"

"Let me tell you something, Harry," he said. "They aren't going to work. They're not wrecked or anything. I just know they aren't worth sweet damn all. Like when Campbell had it. He knew it was going to happen. You can trust the machines just so long. After that, you're batty to lay anything on them at all. But can you see the screen? There it is again. We're turning into view. I can see the earth now. The whole of it."

There was silence then. We looked at the screen but saw only the spotty blackness. I looked from the screen to the speaker overhead, then back at the screen. I looked about the control room. Everyone was doing his work. The instruments all were working. The computers were clicking and nobody looked particularly alarmed, except one other pilot who was there too, Forrest. Maybe Forrest and I pictured ourselves in Lynds' place. Maybe we both had the same premonitions. Maybe we both held the same dislike and distrust of the rest of them. Maybe a lot of things, but one thing was sure. The papers would never get hold of this story, and because of that, Bannister and the rest of them didn't really care a hang about Lynds or me or Forrest or any of the others that might be up there.

It seemed an age passed until we heard Lynds again. The tape later showed it was no more than half a minute. "Bannister, can you hear me?" he said suddenly. "Bannister, do you know what it feels like to be tied into a barrel and tossed over Victoria Falls? Do you? That's what it's like out here. Not that you care a damn. You'll never come up here, you're smart enough for that. Give me a paddle, Bannister, that's what I want. It's no more than a man in a barrel deserves. It's black out here, black and there's nothing to stand on. The earth looks like a flat circle of light and very big, but it doesn't make me feel any better. These buggies of yours won't be any use to anybody until you let the pilot do his own work. I crashed once, in a Gypsy Moth, with my controls all shot away by an overenthusiastic Russian fighter pilot near the Turkish border. Coming down, I felt the way I do now.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Look at the instruments and remember, Bannister. My reflexes are perfect. There's nothing wrong with me. I could split rails with an axe now, if I had an axe. An axe or a paddle. Harry, I'm not getting back down in one piece. Somehow, I know it. Don't you let them do it to anyone else unless there are manual controls from the ejection onwards. Don't do it. This isn't just nosing into the Slot, over the reef between the town and the island and letting go then, and beginning to sweat. This is much more, Harry. This is bloody frightening. Are the three minutes up yet? My stomach is crawling at the thought of you pushing that button and nothing happening. Listen, Bannister, you're not getting me down, so forget any assurances. I hope they never let you put anybody else up here like this. It's black again. We've swung away."

Bannister looked at my eyes. "It's almost time," he said.

Eight seconds later they pushed the button. Perhaps it would have been better if nothing happened then. But that part worked. They got him out of the parabolic curve and headed back down. They fired reverse rockets that slowed him. They threw him into a broad equatorial orbit and let him ride. It took over an hour to be sure he was in orbit. I admired them that, but began to hate them very much. They ascertained the orbit and began new calculations. Here was where he should have had the controls on in.

The escape vehicle was a small delta shaped craft. The wings, if one could call them that, spanned just under seven feet. They planned to bring him down in a pattern based on very orthodox principles of flight. There remained sufficient fuel for a twelve second burst of power. This would decelerate the craft to a point where it would drop from orbit and begin a descent. I later utilized the same pattern by letting down easy into the atmosphere after the power ran down and sort of bouncing off the upper layers several times to further decelerate and finally gliding down through it at about Mach V, decelerating rapidly then, almost too rapidly, and finally passing through the exosphere into the ionosphere. The true stratosphere begins between sixty and seventy miles up, and once you've passed through that level and not burnt up, the rest of it is with the pilot and his craft.

It takes hours. I came down gradually, approaching within striking distance west of Australia, then finally nosed in and took my chance on stretching it to one of the ten mile strips for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a powerless landing. I did it in Australia. But if I had not had orthodox controls, had I even gotten that far, I would have churned up a good part of the Coral Sea between Sydney and New Zealand. You see, you've got to feel your way down through all that. That's the better part of flying, the "feel" of it. Automatic controls don't possess that particular human element. And let me tell you, no matter what they call it now—space probing, astronautics or what have you—it's still flying. And it's still men that will have to do it, escape velocity or no. Like they talk about push-button wars, but they keep training infantry and basing grand strategy on the infantry penetration tactics all down through the history of warfare. They call Clausewitz obsolete today, but they still learn him very thoroughly. I once discussed it with Bannister. He didn't like Clausewitz. Perhaps because Clausewitz was a German before they became Nazis. Clausewitz would not look too kindly on a commander whose concern with a battle precluded his concern for his men. He valued men very highly. They were the greatest instrument then. They still are today. That's why I can't really make too much out of the monkey. I feel pretty rotten about him and all that. But the monkey up there means a man someplace is still down here.

Anyway, after Lynds completed six orbital revolutions, they began the deceleration and descent. The whole affair, as I said, was very solidly based on technical determinations of stresses, heat limits, patterns of glide, and Bannister's absolute conviction

that nothing would let go. The bitter part was that it let go just short of where Lynds might have made it. He was through the bad part of it, the primary and secondary decelerations, the stretches where you think if you don't fry from the heat, the ship will melt apart under you, and the buffeting in the upper levels when ionospheric resistance really starts to take hold. And believe me, the buffeting that you know about, when you approach Mach I in an after-burnered machine, is a piece of cake to the buffeting at Mach V in a rocket when you hit the atmosphere,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

level of atmosphere. The meteorites that strike our atmosphere don't just burn up, we know that now. They also get knocked to bits. And they're solid iron.

Lynds was about seventy miles up, his velocity down to a point or two over Mach II, in level flight heading east over the south Atlantic. From about that altitude, manual controls are essential, not just to make one feel better, but because you really need them. The automated controls did not have any tolerance. You don't understand, do you? Look, when one flies and wants to alter direction, one applies pressure to the control surfaces, altering their positions, redirecting the flow of air over the wings, the rudder and so forth. Now, in applying pressure, you occasionally have to ease up or perhaps press a bit more, as the case may be, to counteract turbulence, shift in air current, or any of a million other circumstances that can occur. That all depends on touch. It's what makes some flyers live longer than others. It's like the drag on a fishing reel. You set it tight or loose according to the weight of the fish you're playing. When you reel in, the line can't become too tight or it will snap, so you have the drag. It's really quite ingenious. It lets the fish pull out line as you reel in. It's the degree of tolerance that makes it work well as an instrument. In flying, the degree of tolerance, the compensating factor is in man's hands. In the atmosphere, it's too unpredictable for any other way.

Well, they calculated to set the dive brakes at twelve degrees at the point where Lynds was. Lynds saw it all.

"This is more like my cup of tea," he said at that point. "Har-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ry, the sky is a strange kind of purple black up here."

"They're going to activate the brakes, Den," I said. "What's it like?"

"Not yet, Harry. Not yet."

I looked at Bannister. He noted the chart, his finger under a line of calculations.

"The precise rate of speed and the exact instant of calculation, Captain Jackson," Bannister said. "Would you care to question anything further."

"He said not yet," I told him.

"Therefore you would say not yet?"

"I would say this. He's about in the stratosphere. He knows where he is now. He's one of the finest pilots in the world. He'll feel the right moment better than your instruments."

"Ridiculous. Fourteen seconds. Stand by."

"Wait," I said.

"And if we wait, where does he come down, I ask you? You cannot calculate haphazardly, by feel. There are only four points at which the landing can be made. It must be now."

I flipped the communications switch, still looking at Bannister.

"This is it, Den. They're coming out now."

"Yes, I see them. What are they set for?"

"Twelve degrees."

"I'm dropping like a stone, Harry. Tell them to ease up on the brake. Bannister, do you he[illegible] me? Bring them in or they'll tear off. This is not flying, anymore." His voice sounded as if he was having difficulty breathing.

"Harry," he called.

They held the brakes at twelve degrees, of course. The calculations dictated that. They tore away in fifteen seconds.

"Bannister! They're gone," Dennis shouted. "They're gone, Bannister, you butcher. Now what do you say?"

Bannister's face didn't flinch. He watched the controls steadily.

"Try half-degree rudder in either direction," I said.

Bannister looked at me for a second. "His direction is vertical, Captain. Would you attempt a rudder manipulation in a vertical dive?"

Not a terminal velocity drive, Bannister. He said it's not flying anymore. Lord knows which way he's falling."

"So?"

"So I'd try anything. You've got to slow him."

"Or return him to level flight."

"At this speed?"

We both looked at the controls now. The ship was accelerating again, and dropping so rapidly I couldn't follow the revolutions counter.

"Engage the ailerons," Bannister ordered. "Point seven degrees, negative."

Dennis came back on. "Harry,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[redacted] are you doing? The ship is falling apart. The ailerons. It won't help. Listen, Harry, you've got to be careful. The flight configuration is so tenuous, anything can turn this thing into a falling stone. It had to happen, I knew, but I don't want to believe it *now*. This *sitting here* with that noise getting louder. It's spiraling out at me, getting bigger. Now it's smaller again. I'm afraid, Harry. The ailerons, Harry, they're gone. Very tenuous. They're gone. I can't see anything. The screens are black. No more shaking. No more noise. It's quiet and I hear myself breathing, Harry. Harry, the wrist straps on the suits are too tight. And the helmet, when you want to scratch your face, you can go mad. And Harry—"

That was the end of the communications. Something in the transmitter must have gone. They never found out. He didn't hit until almost a minute later, and nobody ever saw it. The tracking screen followed him down very precisely and very silently. There was no retrieving anything, of course. You don't conduct salvage operations in the middle of the south Atlantic.

I turned in my report after that. No one had asked for it, so it went through unorthodox channels. It took an awfully long time and my suspension did not become effective until after the second shot. I was the pilot on that one, you know. I got them to install the duplicate controls, over the insistence by Bannister that resorting to them, even in the event that it became necessary, would prove nothing. He even went as far as to talk about load redistribution electric control design. As a matter of fact, I thought he had me for a while, but I think in the end they decided to try to avoid the waste of another vehicle. At least, that might be the kind of argument that would carry weight. The vehicles were enormously expensive, you realize.

I made it all right, as I said. It took me nine hours and then some, once they dropped me from orbit. I switched off the automatic controls at the point where the dive brakes were to have been engaged. This time, the brakes had not responded to the auto controls and they did not open at all. I found out readily enough why Lynds was against opening them at that point. Metal fatigue had brought the ship to a point where even a shift in my position could cause it to stop flying.

I came down in Australia and the braking 'chute tore right out when I released it. I skidded nine miles. A Royal Australian Air Force helicopter picked me up two hours later.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I learned of the suspension while in the hospital. I didn't get out until just in time to get to London for the hearing. My evidence and Forrest's, and Lynds' recorded voice all served to no purpose. You don't become a hero by proving an expert wrong. It doesn't work that way. It would not do to have Bannister looked upon as a bad gambit, not after all they went through to stay in power after putting him in. The reason, after all, was all in the way you looked at it. And a human element could always be overlooked in the cause of human endeavor. Especially when the constituents never find out about it.

After that, they started experimentation with powered returns. The atmosphere has been conquered, and now there remained the last stage. They never did it successfully. They couldn't. But it did not really matter. What it all proved was that they did not really need pilots for what Bannister was after. He had started with a premise of testing man's reactions to space probes under actual conditions, but what he was actually doing was testing space probes alone, with man as a necessary evil to contend with to give the project a reason.

It was all like putting a man in a racing car traveling flat out on the Salts in Bonneville, Utah. He'll survive, of course. But put the man in the car with no controls for him to operate and then run the thing completely through remote transmission, and you've eliminated the purpose for the man. Survival as an afterthought might be a thing to test, if you didn't care a hoot about man. Survival for its own sake doesn't mean anything unless I've missed the whole point of living, somewhere along the line.

Bannister once described to me the firing of a prototype V-2. The firing took place after sunset. When the rocket had achieved a certain altitude, it suddenly took on a brilliant yellow glow. It had passed beyond the shadow of the earth and risen into the sunlight. Here was Bannister's passion. He was out to establish the feasibility of putting a rocket vehicle on the moon. It could have a man in it, or a monkey. Both were just as useless. Neither could fly the thing back, even if it did get down in one piece. It could tell us nothing about the moon we didn't already know. Getting it down in one piece, of course, was the reason why they gave Bannister the project to begin with.

So Bannister is now a triumphant hero, despite the societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. But nobody understood it. Bannister put a vehicle on the moon. We were the first to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the MF laws. What had begun as a popular reaction against 'subliminal living' and the uncontrolled extension of techniques of mass manipulation for political and economic ends had quickly developed into a systematic attack on the psychological sciences. Over-permissive courts of law with their condoning of delinquency, pseudo-enlightened penal reformers, 'victims of society', the psychologist and his patient all came under fierce attack. Discharging their self-hate and anxiety onto a convenient scapegoat, the new rulers, and the great majority electing them, outlawed all forms of psychic control, from the innocent market survey to lobotomy. The mentally ill were on their own, spared pity and consideration, made to pay to the hilt for their failings. The sacred cow of the community was the psychotic, free to wander where he wanted, drooling on doorsteps, sleeping on sidewalks, and woe betide anyone who tried to help him.

GREGORY had made that mistake. Escaping to Europe, first home of psychiatry, in the hope of finding a more tolerant climate, he set up a secret clinic in Paris with six other émigré analysts. For five years they worked undetected, until one of Gregory's patients, a tall ungainly girl with a psychogenic stutter, was revealed to be Muriel Bortman, daughter of the UW President-General. The analysis had failed tragically when the clinic was raided; after her death a lavish show trial (making endless play of electric shock apparatus, movies of insulin coma and the testimony of countless paranoids rounded up in the alleyways) had concluded in a three-year sentence.

Now at last he was out, his savings invested in the Jaguar, fleeing Europe and his memories of the prison for the empty highways of North Africa. He didn't want any more trouble.

"I'd like to help," he told the girl. "But the risks are too high. All your friend can do is try to come to terms with herself."

The girl chewed her lip fretfully. "I don't think she can. Thanks, anyway, doctor."

FOR three hours they sat back silently in the speeding car, until the lights of Tobruk came up ahead, the long curve of the harbor.

"It's 2 a.m.," Gregory said. "There's a motel here, I'll pick you up in the morning."

After they had gone to their rooms he sneaked back to the registry, booked himself into a new chalet. He fell asleep as Carole Sturgeon wandered forlornly up and down the verandas, whispering out his name.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AFTER breakfast he came back from the sea, found a big United World cruiser in the court, orderlies carrying a stretcher out to an ambulance.

A tall Libyan police colonel was leaning against the Jaguar, drumming his leather baton on the windscreen.

"Ah, Dr. Gregory. Good morning." He pointed his baton at the ambulance. "A profound tragedy, such a beautiful American girl."

Gregory rooted his feet in the grey sand, with an effort restrained himself from running over to the ambulance and pulling back the sheet. Fortunately the colonel's uniform and the thousands of morning and evening cell inspections kept him safely to attention.

"I'm Gregory, yes." The dust thickened in his throat. "Is she dead?"

The colonel stroked his neck with the baton. "Ear to ear. She must have found an old razor blade in the bathroom. About 3 o'clock this morning." He headed off towards Gregory's chalet, gesturing with the baton. Gregory followed him into the half light, stood tentatively by the bed.

"I was asleep then. The clerk will vouch for that."

"Naturally." The colonel gazed down at Gregory's possessions spread out across the bedcover, idly poked the black medical bag.

"She asked you for assistance, doctor? With her personal problems?"

"Not directly. She hinted at it, though. She sounded a little mixed up."

"Poor child." The colonel lowered his head sympathetically. "Her father is a first secretary at the Cairo Embassy, something of an autocrat. You Americans are very stern with your children, doctor. A firm hand, yes, but understanding costs nothing. Don't you agree? She was frightened of him, escaped from the American Hospital. My task is to provide an explanation for the authorities. If I had an idea of what was really worrying her . . . no doubt you helped her as best you could?"

Gregory shook his head. "I gave her no help at all, colonel. In fact, I refused to discuss her problems altogether." He smiled flatly at the colonel. "I wouldn't make the same mistake twice, would I?"

The colonel studied Gregory thoughtfully. "Sensible of you, doctor. But you surprise me. Surely the members of your profession regard themselves as a special calling, answerable to a higher authority. Are these ideals so easy to cast off?"

"I've had a lot of practice." Gregory began to pack away his things on the bed, bowed to the colonel as he saluted and made his way out into the court.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HALF an hour later he was on the Benghasi road, holding the Jaguar at 100, working off his tension and anger in savage bursts of speed. Free for only ten days, already he had got himself involved again, gone through all the agony of having to refuse help to someone desperately needing it, his hands itching to administer relief to the child but held back by the insane penalties. It wasn't only the lunatic legislation but the people enforcing it who ought to be swept away—Bortman and his fellow oligarchs.

He grimaced at the thought of the cold dead-faced Bortman, addressing the World Senate at Lake Success, arguing for increased penalties for the criminal psychopath. The man had stepped straight out of the 14th Century Inquisition, his bureaucratic puritanism masking two real obsessions: dirt and death. Any sane society would have locked Bortman up for ever, or given him a complete brain-lift. Indirectly Bortman was as responsible for the death of Carole Sturgeon as he would have been had he personally handed the razor blade to her.

AFTER Libya, Tunis. He blazed steadily along the coast road, the sea like a molten mirror on the right, avoiding the big towns where possible. Fortunately they weren't so bad as the European cities, psychotics loitering like stray dogs in the up-town parks, wise enough not to shop-lift or cause trouble, but a petty nuisance on the cafe terraces, knocking on hotel-room doors at all hours of the night.

At Algiers he spent three days at the Hilton, having a new engine fitted to the car, and hunted up Philip Kalundborg, an old Toronto colleague now working in a WHO children's hospital.

Over their third carafe of burgundy Gregory told him about Carole Sturgeon.

"It's absurd, but I feel guilty about her. Suicide is a highly suggestive act, I reminded her of Muriel Bortman's death. Damn it, Philip, I could have given her the sort of general advice any sensisible layman would have offered."

"Dangerous. Of course you were right," Philip assured him. "After the last three years who could argue otherwise?"

Gregory looked out across the terrace at the traffic whirling over the neon-lit cobbles. Beggars sat at their pitches along the sidewalk, whining for sous.

"Philip, you don't know what it's like in Europe now. At least 5% are probably in need of institutional care. Believe me, I'm frightened to go to America. In New York alone they're jumping from the roofs at the rate of ten a day. The world's turning into a madhouse, one half of society

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gloating righteously over the torments of the other. Most people don't realize which side of the bars they are. It's easier for you. Here the traditions are different."

Kalundborg nodded. "True. In the villages up-country it's been standard practice for centuries to blind schizophrenics and exhibit them in a cage. Injustice is so widespread that you build up an indiscriminate tolerance to every form."

A TALL dark-bearded youth in faded cotton slacks and rope sandals stepped across the terrace and put his hands on their table. His eyes were sunk deep below his forehead, around his lips the brown staining of narcotic poisoning.

"Christian!" Kalundborg snapped angrily. He shrugged hopelessly at Gregory, then turned to the young man with quiet exasperation. "My dear fellow, this has gone on for too long. I can't help you, there's no point in asking."

The young man nodded patiently. "It's Marie," he explained in a slow roughened voice. "I can't control her. I'm frightened what she may do to the baby. Postnatal withdrawal, you know—"

"Nonsense! I'm not an idiot, Christian. The baby is nearly three. If Marie is a nervous wreck you've made her so. Believe me, I wouldn't help you if I was allowed to. You must cure yourself or you are finished. Already you have chronic barbiturism. Dr. Gregory here will agree with me."

Gregory nodded. The young man stared blackly at Kalundborg, glanced at Gregory and then shambled off through the tables.

Kalundborg filled his glass. "They have it all wrong today. They think our job was to further addiction, not cure it. In their pantheon the father-figure is always benevolent."

"That's invariably been Bortman's line. Psychiatry is ultimately self-indulgent, an encouragement to weakness and lack of will. Admittedly there's no one more single-minded than an obsessional neurotic. Bortman himself is a good example."

AS he entered the tenth-floor bedroom the young man was going through his valise on the bed. For a moment Gregory wondered whether he was a UW spy, perhaps the meeting on the terrace had been an elaborate trap.

"Find what you want?"

Christian finished whipping through the bag, then tossed it irritably onto the floor. He edged restlessly away from Gregory around the bed, his eyes hungrily searching the wardrobe top and lamp brackets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Kalundborg was right," Gregory told him quietly. "You're wasting your time."

"The hell with Kalundborg," Christian snarled softly. "He's working the wrong levels. Do you think I'm looking for a jazz heaven, doctor? With a wife and child? I'm not that irresponsible. I took a Master's degree in law at Heidelberg." He wandered off around the room, then stopped to survey Gregory closely.

Gregory began to slide in the drawers. "Well, get back to your jurisprudence. There are enough ills to weigh in this world."

"Doctor, I've made a start. Didn't Kalundborg tell you I sued Bortman for murder?" When Gregory seemed puzzled he explained: "A private civil action, not criminal proceedings. My father killed himself five years ago after Bortman had him thrown out of the Bar Association."

Gregory picked his valise off the floor. "I'm sorry," he said non-committally. "What happened to your suit against Bortman?"

Christian stared out through the window into the dark air. "It was never entered. Some World Bureau investigators saw me after I started to be a nuisance and suggested I leave the States for ever. So I came to Europe to get my degree. I'm on my way back now. I need the barbiturates to stop myself trying to toss a bomb at Bortman."

Suddenly he propelled himself across the room, before Gregory could stop him was out on the balcony, jack-knifed over the edge. Gregory dived after him, kicked away his feet and tried to pull him off the ledge. Christian clung to it, shouting into the darkness, the lights from the cars racing in the damp street below. On the sidewalk people looked up.

CHRISTIAN was doubled up with laughter as they fell back into the room, slumped down on the bed, pointing his finger at Gregory, who was leaning against the wardrobe, gasping in exhausted spasms.

"Big mistake there, doctor. You better get out fast before I tip off the Police Prefect. Stopping a suicide! God, with your record you'd get ten years for that. What a joke!"

Gregory shook him by the shoulders, temper flaring. "Listen, what are you playing at? What do you want?"

Christian pushed Gregory's hands away and lay back weakly. "Help me, doctor. I want to kill Bortman, it's all I think about. If I'm not careful I'll really try. Show me how to forget him." His voice rose desperately. "Damn, I *hated* my father, I was glad when Bortman threw him out."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gregory eyed him thoughtfully, then went over to the window and bolted out the night.

TWO months later, at the motel outside Casablanca, Gregory finally burned the last of the analysis notes. Christian, clean-shaven and wearing a neat white tropical suit, a neutral tie, watched from the door as the stack of coded entries gutted out in the ashtray, then carried them into the bathroom and flushed them away.

When Christian had loaded his suitcases into the car Gregory said: "One thing before we go. A complete analysis can't be effected in two months, let alone two years. It's something you work at all your life. If you have a relapse, come to me, even if I'm in Tahiti, or Shanghai or Archangel." Gregory paused. "If they ever find out, you know what will happen?" When Christian nodded quietly he sat down in the chair by the writing table, gazing out through the date palms at the huge domed mouth of the transatlantic tunnel a mile away. For a long time he knew he would be unable to relax. In a curious way he felt that the three years at Marseilles had been wasted, that he was starting a suspended sentence of indefinite length. There had been no satisfaction at the successful treatment, perhaps because he had given in to Christian partly for fear of be[illegible] incriminated in an attack on Bortman.

"With luck, you should be able to live with yourself now. Try to remember that whatever evils Bortman may perpetrate in the future he's really irrelevant to *your* problem. It was the stroke your mother suffered after your father's death that made you realize the guilt you felt subconsciously for hating him, but you conveniently shifted the blame onto Bortman, and by eliminating him you thought you could free yourself. The temptation may occur again."

Christian nodded, standing motionlessly by the doorway. His face had filled out, his eyes were a placid grey. He looked like any well-groomed UW bureaucrat.

GREGORY picked up a newspaper. "I see Bortman is attacking the American Bar Association as a subversive body, probably planning to have it proscribed. If it succeeds it'll be an irreparable blow to civil liberty." He looked up thoughtfully at Christian, who showed no reaction. "Right, let's go. Are you still fixed on getting back to the States?"

"Of course." Christian climbed into the car, then shook Gregory's hand. Gregory had decided to stay in Africa, find a hospital where he could work, and had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

given Christian the car. "Marie will wait for me in Algiers until I finish my business."

"What's that?"

Christian pressed the starter, sent a roar of dust and exhaust across the compound.

"I'm going to kill Bortman," he said quietly.

Gregory gripped the windscreen. "You're not serious."

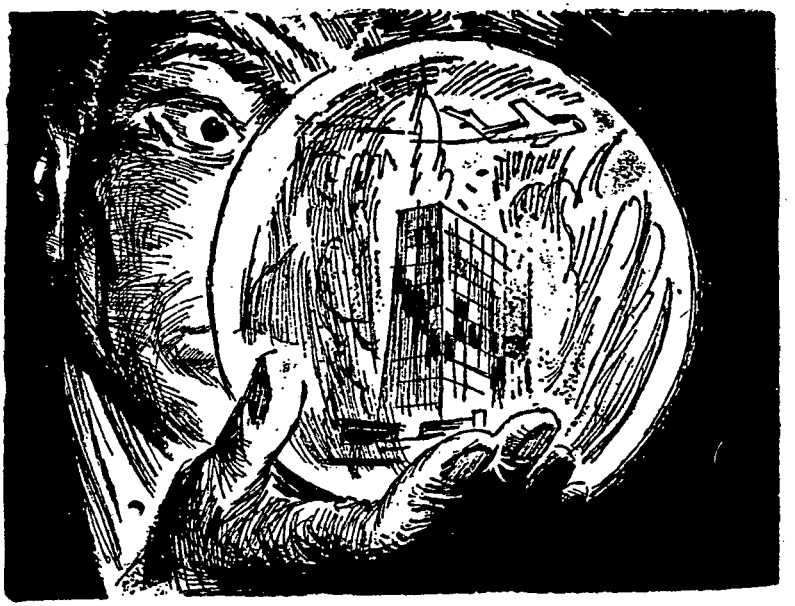
"You cured me, doctor, and give or take the usual margins I'm completely sane, more than I probably ever will be again. Damn few people in this world are now, so that makes the obligation on me to act rationally even greater. Well, every ounce of logic tells me that someone's got to make the effort to get rid of the grim menagerie running things now, and Bortman looks like a pretty good start. I intend to drive up to Lake Success and take a shot at him." He shunted the gear change into second, and added, "Don't try to have me stopped, doctor, because they'll only dig out our long weekend here."

As he started to take his foot off the clutch Gregory shouted: "Christian! You'll never get away with it! They'll catch you anyway!" but the car wrenched forward out of his hand.

Gregory ran through the dust after it, stumbling over half-buried stones, realizing helplessly that when they caught Christian and probed down into the past few months they would soon find the real assassin, an exiled doctor with a three-year grudge.

"Christian!" he yelled, choking on the white ash. "Christian, you're insane!" THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



DIVVY UP

By MILT LESSER

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

Here's a fine, hard story of the inverted ethical system of the post-war world, where inhumanity is the norm and cruelty pays dividends.

HARDESTY fondled the sight picture with his right eye, squinting shut his left eye, caressing the trigger of his rifle with the index finger of his right hand and waiting for the squad leader to issue his commands.

"Ready," called the squad leader.

At times like this, Hardesty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

observed, time seemed suspended. He wondered if it worked that way for the condemned man, too. The sun was just coming up over the rim of the bomb crater, splashing the rubble there with rose and gold. A hungry dog howled somewhere north of the crater.

"Aim . . ."

A dozen rifles were pointed at various parts of the condemned man's anatomy. Hardesty always selected the stomach, although there invariably was a softie in each firing squad to spoil the fun. The hungry dog began to yelp. Someone had probably left ground glass for it.

Before the squad leader could shout the command to fire, a rifle shot cracked flatly, with a complete lack of resonance, across the bomb crater. The condemned man jerked upward, then strained forward in death against the fetters which bound him to the firing post.

"Damn it!" swore the squad leader. "Who the hell did that?"

Jumping the gun had started some years ago strictly as a sport. Now it was business, though, and profitable if you could get away with it and trust your confederate.

"Who did that?" screamed the squad leader.

No one spoke. The dozen members of the firing squad stood rigidly at the aim position, their weapons pointing like accusing fingers at the dead man slumping forward against the firing post. Two crows flapped by like black paper overhead, cawing raucously.

"All right," snapped the squad leader. "Uh-ten-*shun!*"

Rifle stocks were slapped in brisk unison as the weapons were brought down from the aim position through port to order arms. A trickle of sweat rolled across the bridge of Hardesty's nose. A bus rumbled by two blocks east, on what was left of Lexington Avenue. Hardesty wondered if the driver's union sanctioned passenger trapping. He had once traveled ten extra blocks on a bus which had slowed down without stopping at the designated spots. He had watched braver passengers than himself leap from the vehicle, risking broken bones. Well, they probably had time-clocks to punch; Hardesty was in business for himself.

"In-spec-shun — *harms!*" the squad leader screamed. Twelve rifles snapped up to port, twelve bolts were slammed back. The squad leader walked down the line, examining rifle chambers. Three rifles to Hardesty's left, he stopped. "Here she is," he said.

From the corner of his eye, Hardesty saw the girl, calm as murder, hurl her heavy rifle at the squad leader. The stock slammed across his face and knocked him down before he could parry it with his arms. The girl turned and fled up over the rim of the bomb crater.

"Catch her!" bellowed the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squad leader, who stood up, wiped the blood from his lips and sprinted toward the crater rim. Ten members of the squad followed him on the double. The penalty for jumping the gun was severe; the reward for catching the culprit, considerable.

Hardesty did not follow the squad leader.

He waited until the last of the squad had scrambled up the steep slope of the crater wall, waited until the drumming sound of feet on the buckled pavement faded, then approached the dead man still suspended from the firing post. The man's face looked peaceful, as if he were only sleeping. He wore a mackinaw, a pair of patched trousers and heavy rubble-boots. Hardesty could not see where the bullet had gone in.

Approaching the corpse, Hardesty wondered if the girl who had fired prematurely would make good her escape. Lord knew there were places to hide in the bombed-out city. Hardesty began to hope they would capture her, though. It would simplify things. He did not know her name, but fifteen minutes before the execution he had tossed a coin with her. Hardesty had won. She would kill the condemned man prematurely, Hardesty would remain behind to go through his pockets for booty. Later on, they would meet at the stump of the Lever Brothers Building and divvy up. Provided she wasn't caught. Provided Hardesty remembered.

Sucker, he thought.

He reached the dead man and started through the big flap pockets of his mackinaw. A cold wind swirled into the crater, lifting a cloud of choking dust. The first red glow of the sun had faded, leaving a pale and watery orb to fight the gathering clouds in the eastern sky. It looked like snow was on the way. Hardesty found a tattered wallet in the left rear pocket of the man's trousers.

"Hold it," a woman's voice called softly.

Startled, Hardesty looked around. He saw no one. He might hurl himself behind the corpse and the firing post, his rifle ready—but the woman could have been crouched behind the embankment there.

"What do you want?" Hardesty demanded in an arrogant voice. You were a goner if you showed fear. That's what they wanted, fear.

"I'm armed. I have you covered. I can see you but you can't see me. Drop your rifle."

Bluff? Hardesty wondered.

"I'll count three."

And fire on two, you shrew, Hardesty thought. He wondered again about the other girl, the one who was fleeing across the city now. A confederate of hers? It was possible. Double-dealing invited triple dealing. Hardesty thumbed the safety catch forward on his rifle and dropped the weapon at his feet. He still held the dead man's wallet in his left hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The woman appeared over the rear embankment of the crater. She wore a cap with earlaps, a tattered leather lumber-jacket a heavy black skirt, rubble-boots and no gloves. She carried a sawed-off shotgun in the cradle of her bent left arm. She was pretty, but did not look mean enough to be really beautiful. Her eyes were piercing.

"What have you got in your hand?" she said.

"His wallet."

"Give it to me." The young woman came forward, kicked Hardesty's rifle out of reach with her left foot and held out her right hand.

Just then an air-raid siren began to wail. Hardesty looked up at the pale cold sky. He saw no jets. He heard none. The spotters didn't give you much warning these days. *They* knew of the raid in advance, of course. *They* had received word from the spotters up and down the coast. While they would be executed if they failed to report the raid entirely, there was no stipulation on the time limit and no way of proving it if there had been. As a consequence, the spotters were rich men. You hardly had time to lock up or hide your valuables with only seconds to reach shelter.

"Think it's for real?" the woman asked Hardesty.

He shrugged. He still heard no jets. False alarms kept you on your toes and made you wait until the last possible moment when the real thing came. False alarms? The spotters called them air-raid drills.

"I doubt it," Hardesty said truthfully. The bomb crater would make a fairly good shelter, anyway. The worst of the shock waves would pass over it. Hardesty hoped shelter-seeking pedestrians wouldn't find the bomb crater. He might be able to deal with the woman alone, but he'd lose whatever booty was left in the dead man's pockets if a few dozen scavengers came down into the hole.

"Give me the wallet."

Hardesty handed it over. "Who are you?" he said. "A friend of that blonde girl who—"

"Did you take anything else? I'm the widow."

A head was silhouetted briefly against the pale sky above the rim of the crater. The widow fired a warning shot from one barrel of her shotgun, then quickly reloaded it. The head vanished.

"You have no right to your husband's belongings," Hardesty said. "You ought to know that."

"You have a right?"

"Sure. Why don't I?"

"Because I saw what happened. You were in cahoots with that blonde girl, weren't you?" The widow went through her dead husband's pockets as she talked, stuffing what she found into the pockets of her mackinaw. Hardesty stared hungrily at the silver gleam of coins, the dull green of paper money.

"Lady," Hardesty said derisively, "you're a sucker. Your

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION
801

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

husband was holding out on you."

"What else did you find?"

"I didn't say I found anything."

"But you implied it."

"Go scratch," said Hardesty in a taunting voice. He wanted the woman to search him. He thought he could take her if she got busy with his pockets.

"I could kill you and search you afterwards."

"You could, if I didn't hide it where you'd never find it."

"Hide what?" the woman licked her lips eagerly. She looked real pretty now. Hardesty had always preferred the mean, hard look to the unctuous one which stamped so many faces these days. The woman took a step toward Hardesty, who tensed himself. It was the little things like this which made life worth living. The cat and mouse game. Personal politics, it was called. It used to be called ethics. The woman put her hand in the pocket of Hardesty's coat, anxiously searching.

At that moment, the first wave of jets came over.

The sky shook itself, disgorging bombs. A bright flash blossomed beyond the western rim of the crater, and another. Seconds later, Hardesty heard the explosions. The woman had forgotten Hardesty and crouched in terror at the feet of her dead husband, who still stood there leaning forward from the firing post. Had the woman denounced him for some personal reason? wondered Hardesty. It happened all the time. Personal politics.

The second wave of jets came over, their roar all but drowning out the stacatto pop-pop-pop of the AA guns. The country had used up its entire supply of ground-to-bomber missiles. The enemy had depleted its store of fusion and fission bombs. Everyone settled for ack-ack and TNT.

The bombs rained down, exploding like firecrackers on a scale model of the ruined city. It always looked that way to Hardesty. Unreal. He supposed it was like that, unreal, to everyone until the one bomb which was too close and suddenly too real compressed the air before its warhead and shrieked earthward, growing and growing and not cutting off the shriek before the sound of the explosion like kids do when they play war and make vocal bomb sounds but terminating the shriek instantly with the explosion and killing you almost before you heard the sound with concussion or flying masonry or fire.

Like that bomb, right now, right there, which picked up a two-story building, uprooting it at the foundation and lifting it slowly into the air in defiance of gravity, then turning it over gently, teaching it tricks before it perished, flipping it carelessly, indifferently, showering a slow downpour of furniture to the ground through the now floorless bottom story and then turning the whole building once more,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like a child's block caught in a gale, and suddenly sundering it, breaking the building into large pieces which floated lazily downward, exploding with a paradoxical lack of violence into smaller pieces, and the smaller ones into still smaller, until the whole thing came down, dust and shards now, like a multi-colored snowstorm, beyond the rim of the bomb crater.

Afterwards came the concussion, mitigated by the depth of the crater but still strong, flipping Hardesty across the crater floor. He let his muscles go slack, instinctively knowing there would be less likelihood of a broken bone that way. He tasted blood in his mouth and felt his head burrow into rubble and ashes. He stood up groggily as the all-clear sounded. You had to be cautious. Sometimes the spotters tricked you. Then you went out into the open and the bombs came down again almost as if the spotters and the enemy bombardiers were in secret entente with one another and would later meet in some undreamed of neutral place and share the booty collected from corpses and parts of corpses. It was a dog eat dog world.

The concussion had ripped loose the firing post, which had fallen with the dead man still dangling, like a drunk leaning backwards against a lamp-post, across the woman. She lay there under its weight, her legs drumming, her arms twitching.

"Help me," she called to Hardesty in a feeble voice. "Please help me." She was very ugly that way, with a look of supplication on her dirt-smeared face. Hardesty walked over to her and placed his foot on her shoulder so she wouldn't twitch so, then went through her pockets quickly. He found two five million dollar bills and a handful of small denomination coins, one and two hundred thousand dollars each, mostly. Shrugging his disappointment, Hardesty realized it would be only enough to keep him going a week, and that long only if he spent it frugally. Those were the breaks.

"What else did you find?" the woman croaked through bloody lips.

She would probably live, Hardesty figured. She was only pinned there; she didn't seem badly hurt. Naturally, he changed his residence in the bombed-out city every day, but if the blonde girl were caught and described him to save her own neck and if this woman confirmed the description to receive her share of the ten million dollars in denouncer's bounty, Hardesty might possibly be found. The penalty for jumping the gun or aiding gun-jumping was death. Other citizens didn't have their just opportunity to scavenge.

"What else?" the woman asked again.

Hardesty went over and found the sawed-off shotgun. "Nothing," he said, and split the woman's skull open with the stock of the shotgun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hey, man! Hey, over this way!"

A digging crew was working with picks and shovels on a ruined building on 44th Street. It had been an office building of some dozen storys, but the whole façade had collapsed. The offices thus revealed looked like tiny cubicles with cardboard ceilings, floors and walls. The whole ruined structure looked like a giant compartmented eggbox lying on its side, the small square compartments cluttered with impossibly small office furniture carved to perfect scale.

"Hey, man! We got an extra shovel."

Community effort. You had to dig out the ruins. In the early days of the war you looked for living people, but now personal politics had changed that. The diggers had clubs and knives ready in case any survivors were found to contest their booty. They were hacking away at the heaps of broken concrete with consummate effort, stopping every now and then for hot drinks which the Red Cross brought around. They had some union, those Red Cross workers. They were guaranteed ten percent of the booty in any building they serviced during digging. Often only the digging foreman got coffee, but it didn't matter.

The scene reminded Hardesty of a clever children's toy he had seen once. It was a hollow globe of plastic, with water inside. When you turned it upside down, tiny jet bombers dropped tinier bombs on a skyscraper which resembled the Lever Brothers Building. The building flew apart, spitting miniature corpses and furniture out of windows. Minute diggers started to dig at the base of the structure and a Red Cross vehicle spilled out tiny, spider-like Red Cross workers with armbands. When you turned the globe right-side-up again, everything assumed its place like before the air-raid. It was very ingenious.

Hardesty thought it would be a good idea to get out of his neighborhood. There was no telling what had happened to the blonde. If he were caught in her position, he certainly would have squealed. Anyway, Hardesty had heard that the pickings were good down by the old Navy Yard in Brooklyn, provided you could steal a boat and make your way across the East River under the ruined bridges. Some people claimed the waters of the river were stil radioactive, but Hardesty suspected the radiation had long since flowed out to sea. It was probably a rumor promulgated and maintained by the roving bands of Brooklyn scavengers. Hardesty had always preferred being a small businessman. He just couldn't see scavenging for a salary, despite the comparative security it offered.

"Well, what do you say, man?"

"No, really, I have to be getting along."

"All right, then. It's an order." Someone thrust a shovel at Hardesty. He glanced at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man's sleeve and saw the starred armband of a block captain. Damn these civil servants! You hated their guts but had to obey them. Oh, they were psychopathic enough. Hardesty admitted that to himself. You couldn't get any kind of a decent job with the city unless the Civil Service Board passed on your psychopathy. But they were too smug in an orderly, regimented way. They could quote ordinances to you until you wanted to wring their necks but they were right and if you did, you were as good as dead.

Hardesty took the shovel in his numb cold hands and began to dig mechanically where the pick-ax crew had already done its work. After an hour, he had uncovered nothing worthwhile. A teen-aged Red Cross girl brought him a cup of evil-smelling synthetic coffee, but he drank it to warm his stiff muscles.

All at once, he heard a tapping sound coming from a big bronze pipe which had probably carried water or refuse from one of the offices upstairs.

"Someone's alive in there," a youngster next to Hardesty said. He ran over with a pick-ax and began to hack furiously at the rubble.

The block captain rushed to the spot and said, "Are you crazy or something? There's no air in there. Give them a couple of hours and they'll be dead. Are you forgetting your ordinances, boy?"

"But we can save them!" the youngster said in some confusion.

"We got too many mouths to feed as it is. Anyhow, you want them contesting the booty. If they survive, they're liable to claim it all."

"I—I'm sorry." The youngster stopped hacking away with his pick-ax. He seemed genuinely contrite, but you never knew about that type. He might come back tonight and dig in private. By then, fortunately, it would be too late. But the city hospitals were full of just such people who couldn't adjust to the rigors of war. Hardesty had heard about a proposed bill which would have them all killed painlessly. That was no way to die, without pain, but it served them right. Of course, thought Hardesty bitterly, the city would claim all their booty—which was another matter entirely.

Five minutes later, Hardesty found a dismembered arm. It was already frozen with the cold and seemed more like wax than flesh. The arm was too muscular to have belonged to a woman. The man had worn a ring and a gold-plated wristwatch which, between them, might bring eighty or ninety million dollars on the black market. Hardesty got the watch loose and was working the ring off the frozen fingers when the block captain spotted him.

"I saw that," he said. He had a big beefy face with eyes so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

close together they seemed to be forever staring at the tip of his nose. "You think you're in business for yourself?"

"I'm sorry," Hardesty said lamely. "Habit. I'm a scavenger by occupation. Here. Here's the ring."

The beefy-faced man scrutinized the ring and pocketed it. "The wristwatch," he said.

"There must be some mistake."

"I saw you put it in your pocket."

"No, you must have been imagining things." What would it bring on the black market? Fifty million dollars in a quick sale? Decent living for a month. Hardesty was damned if the block captain would get it.

"Fork it over, wise guy."

The other diggers had stopped their work to watch Hardesty's growing—and now perilous—discomfort. "Let's just get on with the work," Hardesty suggested. He had placed the sawed-off shotgun down near the curb when he started digging. He saw it there now, with one of the Red Cross teen-agers staring at it covetously. He wondered if he could reach it in time and blast the beefy block captain's face in. He decided the shovel would be quicker and every bit as effective.

"For the last time . . ." began the block captain.

Swinging the shovel like a baseball bat, Hardesty bounced it off his jaw. He didn't wait to see the results. He bolted for the curb, scooped up his sawed-off shotgun, and ran.

It was snowing now, big dry flakes which fell from a windless sky, slow patient flakes which would fall for many hours if the leaden sky was any indication, choking the broken arteries of the perishing city.

Let it, thought Hardesty. I don't have to go to Brooklyn, after all. I know where I can dispose of this wristwatch.

He was jogging along in no great hurry. He had darted down Vanderbilt Avenue by the ruins of Grand Central Station, then cut back and forth through the streets in the low forties. They had chased him for a while but had given him up by now, he supposed. Hell, it was only one wristwatch. He slowed to a walk along Park Avenvue and watched the city die.

The city had been moribund ever since Hardesty could remember. It seemed the natural state of things, just as the public politicians had finally given in to the inevitable and now decried that war was the natural state of human society. With war, cities died. With dead cities, war became a more personal thing. That was where personal politics came in. War became an individual thing as well as a social enterprise. That was the way you lived.

An old woman came trudging along in the snow, her boot-shod feet making footprints clear down through the thin white

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

covering to the broken gray sidewalk beneath it. She was selling poor-grade booty, trinkets and a few items of faded old clothing. "Anything I've got," she hawked, holding a yellow straw basket up for Hardesty's inspection, "anything in the basket for only a hundred thousand dollars."

When Hardesty shook his head, she tagged along, gripping his sleeve in clawlike fingers and tugging at it. "Go away, grandma," he said. The old lady went on ranting about her wares in a high, incongruously childish voice. Maybe a few of the diggers were still looking for him, Hardesty thought. The crone's piercing voice would attract people for blocks.

The hag cleared her throat and spat yellow phlegm in the clean white snow. "See this dress? See, it's second hand, but you could hardly tell. For you, a special price because you have a cruel face. For you—"

"Damn it!" said Hardesty, and fished in his pocket for a few coins. There was no one else on the street, no one else on the lonely landscape of battered buildings and stumps of buildings. A few feet to Hardesty's left, a fire hydrant had ruptured; a torrent of water gushed from it, freezing at the edges of the large puddle which had formed, as if the ice had started there and would approach the hydrant and strangle it. Hardesty was surprised that the city still pumped so much pressure through its water mains.

"Here," Hardesty said, handing the old woman a few coins and taking her basket. It was unexpectedly heavy. The old woman thanked him profusely in her childish voice. Hardesty had no use for the contents of the basket, but wouldn't return it to the hag. Later he could dispose of it. Returning it to her would be charity, and you just did not indulge in charity.

The old woman walked off through the snow, cackling happily.

"There he is!" someone cried.

Hardesty heard the footfalls pounding behind him. The diggers. He began to run, hurling the basket away from him. He turned around to look and saw four or five shapes sprinting after him. Hardesty raised the shotgun without bothering to aim and fired both barrels. The hag clutched her throat and pitched forward in the snow. One of the men fell with her. Hardesty tossed the now useless shotgun aside and heard something clatter against the wall next to him. Sparks flew. It was a knife. The man's aim had been good, almost too good.

Hardesty circled the block twice, then hid in a doorway. It was a doorway to absolutely nowhere. On one side was the street, on the other was a rubble-filled bomb crater. This had once been a building, but only the doorway stood. Even the door had been blown to bits.

A sign over the door said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WAL — RIA. Hardesty thought a hotel had stood here, long ago. He crouched in the doorway and waited, catching his breath. It was so cold, his teeth began to chatter uncontrollably. His lungs, though, were on fire, and his nostrils. He couldn't stay there too long. He would freeze to death. Perhaps they had taken a wrong turn over on Madison Avenue.

Hardesty walked boldly out into the street. No one stopped him.

Ten minutes later, after hiding in a pile of rubble when he saw someone coming down the street, Hardesty found himself passing the stump of the Lever Brothers Building. The girl, he thought suddenly. He had forgotten about the blonde. He shouldn't be passing here. She might be waiting for him.

"Psst! Hey, it's me. I didn't know to expect you or what."

It was the blonde's voice. Hardesty had in mind to run again, but there would be too many people after him, too many people who, out of spite or patriotism, would identify him and denounce him. He would share the executed man's booty with the blonde girl. But not the wristwatch. She had nothing to do with the wristwatch. Maybe, he thought, she even knew of a good warm place to sleep.

"I had a little delay," Hardesty said. He didn't see the blonde anywhere. She was inside the building.

"Well, come on in."

People came from all ov[illegible] Manhattan to see the Lever Brothers stump. Miraculously, some of the green-tinted glass was still whole. No one could explain this except to say it was a freak of concussion, and it *had* happened, hadn't it? The few panes which remained were almost the only unbroken panes of glass in New York City.

It was green in there, and dim. Looking out through the glass, the snow resembled tons of chopped spinach coming down. The blonde's hair was green. Her skin was green, and her eyes. She had a hard cold look on her face now.

"Well?" she said.

Hardesty began to empty his pockets for the divvy up.

Someone said, "Stop right there! Hold it."

The man was big and had probably used many times with success the gun he carried in his fist. It was the man who had spoken. He covered Hardesty with the gun while the blonde hastily went through the booty they had found.

"You're being held under city ordinance 217," the big man told Hardesty. Ordinance 217 was concerned with gun-jumping or aiding a gun-jumper. The penalty was death.

Not long afterwards, Hardesty was bound to a firing post near the embankment of a crater close to the Lever Brothers stump, but far enough away so none of the glass would be shat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[redacted]red. The firing squad lined up. The blonde girl was third from the right. Hardesty hoped someone would aim for his stomach and the others would miss. If he had to die, he wanted to die painfully.

"Ready!" barked the squad leader. Hardesty wasn't sure, but thought he was the same man who had led that other squad.

"Aim . . ."

Time was suspended again. Even more for the condemned.

And then, before the squad leader could shout "fire!" Hardesty heard a gunshot. He didn't feel the bullet go in, but as he slumped forward away from the firing post he felt a warm wetness, and no other sensation, in his chest. With a final effort of will he looked up and saw the blonde girl's face. There was a faint smile tugging at the corners of her lips. All at once Hardesty knew. She had probably taken someone in this squad aside, as she had taken Hardesty aside. She had made a deal with him. Meet at the Lever Brothers stump, or someplace else? Divvy up. It was the surest way to catch gun-jumpers. The blonde girl was working for the government and probably collected a healthy slice of the booty.

The last thing Hardesty ever heard was the squad leader's angry voice as the man roared: "Who the hell jumped the gun?"

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

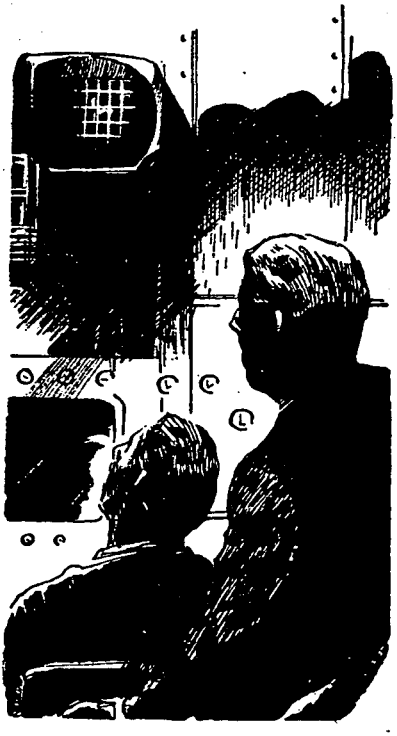
WHAT NEED of MAN?

By HAROLD CALIN

Illustrated by SUMMERS

Bannister was a rocket scientist. He started with the premise of testing man's reaction to space probes under actual conditions; but now he was just testing space probes—and man was a necessary evil to contend with.

WHEN you are out in a clear night in summer, the sky looks very warm and friendly. The moon is a big pleasant place where it may not be so humid as where you are, and it is lighter than anything you've ever seen. That's the way it is in summer. You never think about space being "out there". It's all one big wonderful thing, and you can never really fall off, or have anything bad happen to you. There is just that much more to see. You lie on the grass and look at the sky long enough and you fall into sort of a detached mood. It's suddenly as if you're looking down at the sky and you're lying on a ceiling by some reverse process of gravitation, and everything is absolutely pleasant.



In winter it's quite another thing, of course. That's because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sky never looks warm. In winter, if you are in a cold climate, the sky doesn't appear at all friendly. It's beautiful, mind you, but never friendly. That is when you see it as it really is. Summer has a way of making it look friendly. The way you see it on a winter night is only the merest idea of what it is really like. That's why I can't feel too bad about the monkey. You see, it might have been a man, maybe me. I've been out there, too.

There are two types of classified government information. One is the type that is really classified because it is concerned with efforts and events that are of true importance and go beyond public evaluation. Occasional unauthorized reports on this type of information, within the scope that I knew it at least, are written off as unidentified flying objects or such. The second type of classified information is the kind that somehow always gets into the newspapers all over the world . . . like the X-15, and Project Dyna-Soar . . . and Project Argus.

Project Argus had as its basis theory that was proven completely unsound six years ago. It was proven unsound by Dennis Lynds. He got killed doing it. It had to do with return vehicles from capsules traveling as escape velocity, being oriented and controlled completely [redacted] telemetering devices. It didn't work. This time, the monkey was used for newspaper consumption. I'm sure Bannister would have preferred it if the monkey had been killed on contact. It would have been simpler that way. No mass hysteria about torturing a poor, ignorant beast. A simple scientific sacrifice, already dead upon announcement, would have been a *fait accompli*, so to speak, and nothing could overshadow the success of Project Argus.

But Project Argus was a failure. Maybe someday you'll understand why.

Because of the monkey? Possibly. You see, I flew the second shot after Lynds got killed. After that, came the hearing, and after that no men flew in Bannister's ships anymore. They proved Lynds nuts, and got rid of me, but nobody would try it, even with manual controls, where there is no atmosphere.

When you're putting down after a maximum velocity flight, you feed a set of landing coordinates into the computer, and you wait for the computer to punch out a landing configuration and the controls set themselves and lock into pattern. Then you just sit there. I haven't yet met a pilot who didn't begin to sweat at that moment, and sweat all the way down. We

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weren't geared for that kind of flying. We still aren't, for that matter. We had always done it ourselves, (even on instruments, we interepreted their meaning to the controls ourselves) and we didn't like it. We had good reason. The telemetry circuits were no good. That's a bad part of a truly classified operation: they don't have to be too careful, there aren't any voters to offend. About the circuits, sometimes they worked, sometimes not. That was the way it went. They wouldn't put manual controls in for us.

It wasn't that they regarded man with too little faith, and electronic equipment with too much. They just didn't regard man at all. They looked upon scientific reason and technology as completely infallible. Nothing is infallible. Not their controls, not their vehicles, and not their blasted egos.

Lynds was assigned the first flight at escape velocity. They could not be dissuaded from the belief that at ultimate speed, a pilot operating manual controls was completely ineffectual. Like kids that have to run electric trains all by themselves, playing God with a transformer. That was when I asked them why bother with a pilot altogether. They talked about the whole point being a test of man's ability to survive; they'd deal with control in proper order. They didn't believe it, and neither did we. We all got very peculiar feelings about the whole business after that. The position on controls was made pretty final by Bannister.

"There will be no manuals in my ships," he said. "It would negate the primary purpose of this project. We must ascertain the successful completion of escape and return by completely automatic operation."

"How about emergency controls?" I asked. "With a switch-off from automatic if they should fail."

"They will not fail. Any manual controls would be inoperative by the pilot in any case. No more questions."

I feel the way I do about the monkey, Argus, because, in a way, we all quit about that time. You don't like having spent your life in a rather devoted way with purposes and all that, and then being placed in the hands of a collection of technologists like just so many white mice . . . or monkeys, if you will. Lynds, of course, had little choice. The project was cleared and the assignment set. He hated it well enough, I know, but it was his place to perform the only way one does.

It ended the way we knew it would. I heard it all. It wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gruesome, as you might imagine. I spoke with Lynds the whole time. It was sort of a resigned horror. The initial countdown went off without a hitch and the hissing of the escape valves on the carrier rocket changed to a sound that hammered the sky apart as it lifted off the pad.

"Well, she's off," somebody said.

"Let's don't count chickens," Bannister said tautly. Wellington G. Bannister worked for the Germans on V-2s. He is the chief executive of technology in the section to which we were assigned at that time. He is the world's leading expert on exotic fuel rocket projectile systems, rocket design, and a brilliant electronic engineer as well. High enough subordinates call him Wellie. Pilots always called him Professor Bannister. I issued the report that was read in closed session in London in which I accused Bannister of murdering Lynds. That's how come I'm here now. I was cashiered out, just short of a general court martial. That's one of the nice parts about truly classified work. They can't make you out an idiot in public. Living on a boat in the Mediterranean is far nicer than looking up at the earth through a porthole in a smashed up ship on the moon, you must admit.

Well, Bannister could have well counted chickens on that launching. The first, second and third stages fired off perfectly, and within fourteen minutes the capsule detached into orbit just under escape velocity. The orbit was enormously far out. They let Lynds complete a single orbit, then fired the capsule's rockets. He ran off tangential to orbit at escape velocity on a pattern that would probably run in a straight path to infinity. In fact, the capsule is probably still on its way, and as I said, it's six years now. After four minutes, the return vehicle was activated and as it broke away from the capsule, Lynds blacked out for twenty seconds. That was the only time I was out of direct contact with him after he went into orbit.

"Now do you understand about the manual controls?" Bannister said.

"He'll come out of it in less than a minute."

"One can never be sure."

"There's still no reason why you can't use duplicate control systems."

"With a switch-off on the automatic, if they fail?"

"Yes. If for nothing more than to give a man a chance to save his own neck."

"They won't fail."

"The simplest things fail, Bannister. Campbell was killed in a far less elaborate way."

He looked at me. "Campbell?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[redacted], yes. The landing over the reef. I had nothing to do with that."

"You designed the power shut-off that failed."

"Improper servicing. A simple mechanical failure."

"Or the inability of a mechanism to compensate. The wind shifted after computer coordination. A pilot can feel it. Your instruments can't. There was no failure, there. The shut-off worked perfectly and Campbell was killed because of it."

I watched the tracking screen, listened to the high keening noises coming from the receivers. The computers clicked rapidly, feeding out triangulated data on the positions of the escape vehicle and the capsule. The capsule had been diverted from its path slightly by reaction to the vehicle's ejection. Its speed, however, was increasing as it moved farther out. The vehicle with Lynds was in a path parabolic to the capsule, almost like the start of an orbit, but at a fantastic distance. He was, of course, traveling at escape velocity or better, and you do not orbit at escape velocity.

"Harry. Harry, how long was I out?" We heard Lynds' voice come alive suddenly through the crackling static.

"Hello, Dennis. Listen to me. How are you?"

"I'm fine, Harry. What's wrong? How long was I out?"

"Nothing is wrong. You were out less than half a minute. The ejection gear worked perfectly."

"That's good." The tension left his voice and he settled back to a checking and rechecking of instruments, reactions and what he would see. They activated the scanner. The transmitting equipment brought us a view that was little more than a spotty blackness. But I think the equipment was not working properly. You see, what Lynds said did not quite match what we saw. They later used the recording of his voice together with an affidavit sworn to by a technician that our receiver was operating perfectly, as evidence in my hearing. They proved, in their own way, that Lynds had suffered continual delirium after blacking out. The speed, they said, was the cause. It became known as Danger V. Nobody ever bothered to explain why I never encountered the phenomenon of Danger V. It became official record, and my experience was the deviant. It was Bannister's alibi.

We watched the spotty blackness on the screen and listened to Lynds.

"Harry, I can see it all pretty well now," he began. "There's slight spin on this bomb so it comes and goes. About sixty second revolutions. Nice and slow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Terribly nauseating to look at. But I'm feeling fine now, better than fine. Give me a stick and I'll move the Earth. Who was it said that? Clever fellow. You say I was out about half a minute. That makes it about three more minutes until Bannister's controls are supposed to bring me back."

"Yes, Dennis, but what do you see? Do you hear me? What do you see?"

"Let me tell you something, Harry," he said. "They aren't going to work. They're not wrecked or anything. I just know they aren't worth sweet damn all. Like when Campbell had it. He knew it was going to happen. You can trust the machines just so long. After that, you're batty to lay anything on them at all. But can you see the screen? There it is again. We're turning into view. I can see the earth now. The whole of it."

There was silence then. We looked at the screen but saw only the spotty blackness. I looked from the screen to the speaker overhead, then back at the screen. I looked about the control room. Everyone was doing his work. The instruments all were working. The computers were clicking and nobody looked particularly alarmed, except one other pilot who was there too, Forrest. Maybe Forrest and I pictured ourselves in Lynds' place. Maybe we both had the same premonitions. Maybe we both held the same dislike and distrust of the rest of them. Maybe a lot of things, but one thing was sure. The papers would never get hold of this story, and because of that, Bannister and the rest of them didn't really care a hang about Lynds or me or Forrest or any of the others that might be up there.

It seemed an age passed until we heard Lynds again. The tape later showed it was no more than half a minute. "Bannister, can you hear me?" he said suddenly. "Bannister, do you know what it feels like to be tied into a barrel and tossed over Victoria Falls? Do you? That's what it's like out here. Not that you care a damn. You'll never come up here, you're smart enough for that. Give me a paddle, Bannister, that's what I want. It's no more than a man in a barrel deserves. It's black out here, black and there's nothing to stand on. The earth looks like a flat circle of light and very big, but it doesn't make me feel any better. These buggies of yours won't be any use to anybody until you let the pilot do his own work. I crashed once, in a Gypsy Moth, with my controls all shot away by an overenthusiastic Russian fighter pilot near the Turkish border. Coming down, I felt the way I do now.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[redacted]ook at the instruments and remember, Bannister. My reflexes are perfect. There's nothing wrong with me. I could split rails with an axe now, if I had an axe. An axe or a paddle. Harry, I'm not getting back down in one piece. Somehow, I know it. Don't you let them do it to anyone else unless there are manual controls from the ejection onwards. Don't do it. This isn't just nosing into the Slot, over the reef between the town and the island and letting go then, and beginning to sweat. This is much more, Harry. This is bloody frightening. Are the three minutes up yet? My stomach is crawling at the thought of you pushing that button and nothing happening. Listen, Bannister, you're not getting me down, so forget any assurances. I hope they never let you put anybody else up here like this. It's black again. We've swung away."

Bannister looked at my eyes. "It's almost time," he said.

Eight seconds later they pushed the button. Perhaps it would have been better if nothing happened then. But that part worked. They got him out of the parabolic curve and headed back down. They fired reverse rockets that slowed him. They threw him into a broad equatorial orbit and let him ride. It took over an hour to be sure he was in orbit. I admired them that, but began to hate them very much. They ascertained the orbit and began new calculations. Here was where he should have had the controls on in.

The escape vehicle was a small delta shaped craft. The wings, if one could call them that, spanned just under seven feet. They planned to bring him down in a pattern based on very orthodox principles of flight. There remained sufficient fuel for a twelve second burst of power. This would decelerate the craft to a point where it would drop from orbit and begin a descent. I later utilized the same pattern by letting down easy into the atmosphere after the power ran down and sort of bouncing off the upper layers several times to further decelerate and finally gliding down through it at about Mach V, decelerating rapidly then, almost too rapidly, and finally passing through the exosphere into the ionosphere. The true stratosphere begins between sixty and seventy miles up, and once you've passed through that level and not burnt up, the rest of it is with the pilot and his craft.

It takes hours. I came down gradually, approaching within striking distance west of Australia, then finally nosed in and took my chance on stretching it to one of the ten mile strips for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a powerless landing. I did it in Australia. But if I had not had orthodox controls, had I even gotten that far, I would have churned up a good part of the Coral Sea between Sydney and New Zealand. You see, you've got to feel your way down through all that. That's the better part of flying, the "feel" of it. Automatic controls don't possess that particular human element. And let me tell you, no matter what they call it now—space probing, astronautics or what have you—it's still flying. And it's still men that will have to do it, escape velocity or no. Like they talk about push-button wars, but they keep training infantry and basing grand strategy on the infantry penetration tactics all down through the history of warfare. They call Clausewitz obsolete today, but they still learn him very thoroughly. I once discussed it with Bannister. He didn't like Clausewitz. Perhaps because Clausewitz was a German before they became Nazis. Clausewitz would not look too kindly on a commander whose concern with a battle precluded his concern for his men. He valued men very highly. They were the greatest instrument then. They still are today. That's why I can't really make too much out of the monkey. I feel pretty rotten about him and all that. But the monkey up there means a man someplace is still down here.

Anyway, after Lynds co[redacted] ed six orbital revolutions, they began the deceleration and descent. The whole affair, as I said, was very solidly based on technical determinations of stresses, heat limits, patterns of glide, and Bannister's absolute conviction

that nothing would let go. The bitter part was that it let go just short of where Lynds might have made it. He was through the bad part of it, the primary and secondary decelerations, the stretches where you think if you don't fry from the heat, the ship will melt apart under you, and the buffeting in the upper levels when ionospheric resistance really starts to take hold. And believe me, the buffeting that you know about, when you approach Mach I in an after-burnered machine, is a piece of cake to the buffeting at Mach V in a rocket when you hit the atmosphere,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[redacted]evel of atmosphere. The [redacted]eteorites that strike our atmosphere don't just burn up, we know that now. They also get knocked to bits. And they're solid iron.

Lynds was about seventy miles up, his velocity down to a point or two over Mach II, in level flight heading east over the south Atlantic. From about that altitude, manual controls are essential, not just to make one feel better, but because you really need them. The automated controls did not have any tolerance. You don't understand, do you? Look, when one flies and wants to alter direction, one applies pressure to the control surfaces, altering their positions, redirecting the flow of air over the wings, the rudder and so forth. Now, in applying pressure, you occasionally have to ease up or perhaps press a bit more, as the case may be, to counteract turbulence, shift in air current, or any of a million other circumstances that can occur. That all depends on touch. It's what makes some flyers live longer than others. It's like the drag on a fishing reel. You set it tight or loose according to the weight of the fish you're playing. When you reel in, the line can't become too tight or it will snap, so you have the drag. It's really quite ingenious. It lets the fish pull out line as you reel in. It's the degree of tolerance that makes it work well as an instrument. In flying, the degree of tolerance, the compensating factor is in man's hands. In the atmosphere, it's too unpredictable for any other way.

Well, they calculated to set the dive brakes at twelve degrees at the point where Lynds was. Lynds saw it all.

"This is more like my cup of tea," he said at that point. "Har-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ry, the sky is a strange kind of purple black up here."

"They're going to activate the brakes, Den," I said. "What's it like?"

"Not yet, Harry. Not yet."

I looked at Bannister. He noted the chart, his finger under a line of calculations.

"The precise rate of speed and the exact instant of calculation, Captain Jackson," Bannister said. "Would you care to question anything further."

"He said not yet," I told him.

"Therefore you would say not yet?"

"I would say this. He's about in the stratosphere. He knows where he is now. He's one of the finest pilots in the world. He'll feel the right moment better than your instruments."

"Ridiculous. Fourteen seconds. Stand by."

"Wait," I said.

"And if we wait, where does he come down, I ask you? You cannot calculate haphazardly, by feel. There are only four points at which the landing can be made. It must be now."

I flipped the communications switch, still looking at Bannister.

"This is it, Den. They're coming out now."

"Yes, I see them. What are they set for?"

"Twelve degrees."

"I'm dropping like a stone, Harry. Tell them to ease up on the brake. Bannister, do you [redacted] me? Bring them in or they'll tear off. This is not flying, anymore." His voice sounded as if he was having difficulty breathing.

"Harry," he called.

They held the brakes at twelve degrees, of course. The calculations dictated that. They tore away in fifteen seconds.

"Bannister! They're gone," Dennis shouted. "They're gone, Bannister, you butcher. Now what do you say?"

Bannister's face didn't flinch. He watched the controls steadily.

"Try half-degree rudder in either direction," I said.

Bannister looked at me for a second. "His direction is vertical, Captain. Would you attempt a rudder manipulation in a vertical dive?"

Not a terminal velocity drive, Bannister. He said it's not flying anymore. Lord knows which way he's falling."

"So?"

"So I'd try anything. You've got to slow him."

"Or return him to level flight."

"At this speed?"

We both looked at the controls now. The ship was accelerating again, and dropping so rapidly I couldn't follow the revolutions counter.

"Engage the ailerons," Bannister ordered. "Point seven degrees, negative."

Dennis came back on. "Harry,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[redacted]re you doing? The ship is [redacted]ing apart. The ailerons. It won't help. Listen, Harry, you've got to be careful. The flight configuration is so tenuous, anything can turn this thing into a falling stone. It had to happen, I knew, but I don't want to believe it now. This sitting here with that noise getting louder. It's spiraling out at me, getting bigger. Now it's smaller again. I'm afraid, Harry. The ailerons, Harry, they're gone. Very tenuous. They're gone. I can't see anything. The screens are black. No more shaking. No more noise. It's quiet and I hear myself breathing, Harry. Harry, the wrist straps on the suits are too tight. And the helmet, when you want to scratch your face, you can go mad. And Harry—"

That was the end of the communications. Something in the transmitter must have gone. They never found out. He didn't hit until almost a minute later, and nobody ever saw it. The tracking screen followed him down very precisely and very silently. There was no retrieving anything, of course. You don't conduct salvage operations in the middle of the south Atlantic.

I turned in my report after that. No one had asked for it, so it went through unorthodox channels. It took an awfully long time and my suspension did not become effective until after the second shot. I was the pilot on that one, you know. I got them to install the duplicate controls, over the insistence by Bannister that resorting to them, even in the event that it became necessary, would prove nothing. He even went as far as to talk about load redistribution electric control design. As a matter of fact, I thought he had me for a while, but I think in the end they decided to try to avoid the waste of another vehicle. At least, that might be the kind of argument that would carry weight. The vehicles were enormously expensive, you realize.

I made it all right, as I said. It took me nine hours and then some, once they dropped me from orbit. I switched off the automatic controls at the point where the dive brakes were to have been engaged. This time, the brakes had not responded to the auto controls and they did not open at all. I found out readily enough why Lynds was against opening them at that point. Metal fatigue had brought the ship to a point where even a shift in my position could cause it to stop flying.

I came down in Australia and the braking 'chute tore right out when I released it. I skidded nine miles. A Royal Australian Air Force helicopter picked me up two hours later.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I learned of the suspension while in the hospital. I didn't get out until just in time to get to London for the hearing. My evidence and Forrest's, and Lynds' recorded voice all served to no purpose. You don't become a hero by proving an expert wrong. It doesn't work that way. It would not do to have Bannister looked upon as a bad gambit, not after all they went through to stay in power after putting him in. The reason, after all, was all in the way you looked at it. And a human element could always be overlooked in the cause of human endeavor. Especially when the constituents never find out about it.

After that, they started experimentation with powered returns. The atmosphere has been conquered, and now there remained the last stage. They never did it successfully. They couldn't. But it did not really matter. What it all proved was that they did not really need pilots for what Bannister was after. He had started with a premise of testing man's reactions to space probes under actual conditions, but what he was actually doing was testing space probes alone, with man as a necessary evil to contend with to give the project a reason.

It was all like putting a man in a racing car traveling flat out on the Salts in Bonneville, Utah. He'll survive, of course. B[redacted] the man in the car with no controls for him to operate and then run the thing completely through remote transmission, and you've eliminated the purpose for the man. Survival as an afterthought might be a thing to test, if you didn't care a hoot about man. Survival for its own sake doesn't mean anything unless I've missed the whole point of living, somewhere along the line.

Bannister once described to me the firing of a prototype V-2. The firing took place after sunset. When the rocket had achieved a certain altitude, it suddenly took on a brilliant yellow glow. It had passed beyond the shadow of the earth and risen into the sunlight. Here was Bannister's passion. He was out to establish the feasibility of putting a rocket vehicle on the moon. It could have a man in it, or a monkey. Both were just as useless. Neither could fly the thing back, even if it did get down in one piece. It could tell us nothing about the moon we didn't already know. Getting it down in one piece, of course, was the reason why they gave Bannister the project to begin with.

So Bannister is now a triumphant hero, despite the societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. But nobody understood it. Bannister put a vehicle on the moon. We were the first to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do it. We proved something by doing nothing. Perhaps the situation of true classified information is not too healthy a one, at that. You see, we've had rockets with that kind of power for an awfully long time now. Maybe some of them know what he's up to. When I think about that, I really become frightened.

The monkey, I suppose, is dead. The most we can hope for is that he died fast. It's very like another kind of miserable hope I felt once, a long time ago, for a lot of people who could be offered little more than hope for a fast death, because of something somebody was trying to prove. There's some consolation this time. It's really only a monkey.

This I know, they'll never publish a picture of the vehicle. Someone might start to wonder why the cabin seems equipped to carry a man.

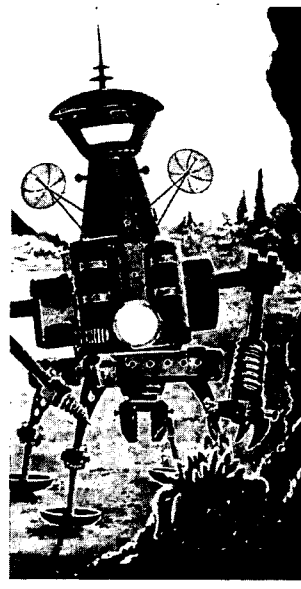
When you're out in a clear night in summer, the sky looks very friendly, the moon a big pleasant place where nothing at all can happen to you. The vehicle used in Project Argus had a porthole. I can't imagine why. The monkey must have been able to see out the porthole. Did he notice, I wonder, whether the earth looks friendly from out there.

THE END

"Don't call me a one-arm driver!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION



BRIAN W. ALDISS	HEN'S EYES
POUL ANDERSON	THIRD STAGE
A. BERTRAM CHANDLER	THE KEY
GORDON R. DICKSON	IT HARDLY SEEMS FAIR
JOHN CHRISTOPHER	WINTER BOY, SUMMER GIRL
J. G. BALLARD	THE INSANE ONE
MILTON LESSER	DIVVY UP
HAROLD CALVIN	WHAT NEED OF MAN?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED